



ログ・ホライズン

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橙乃ママレ 著 ハラカズヒロ 画

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G-HORIZON

2 キヤメロットの騎士たち

ログ・ホライズン





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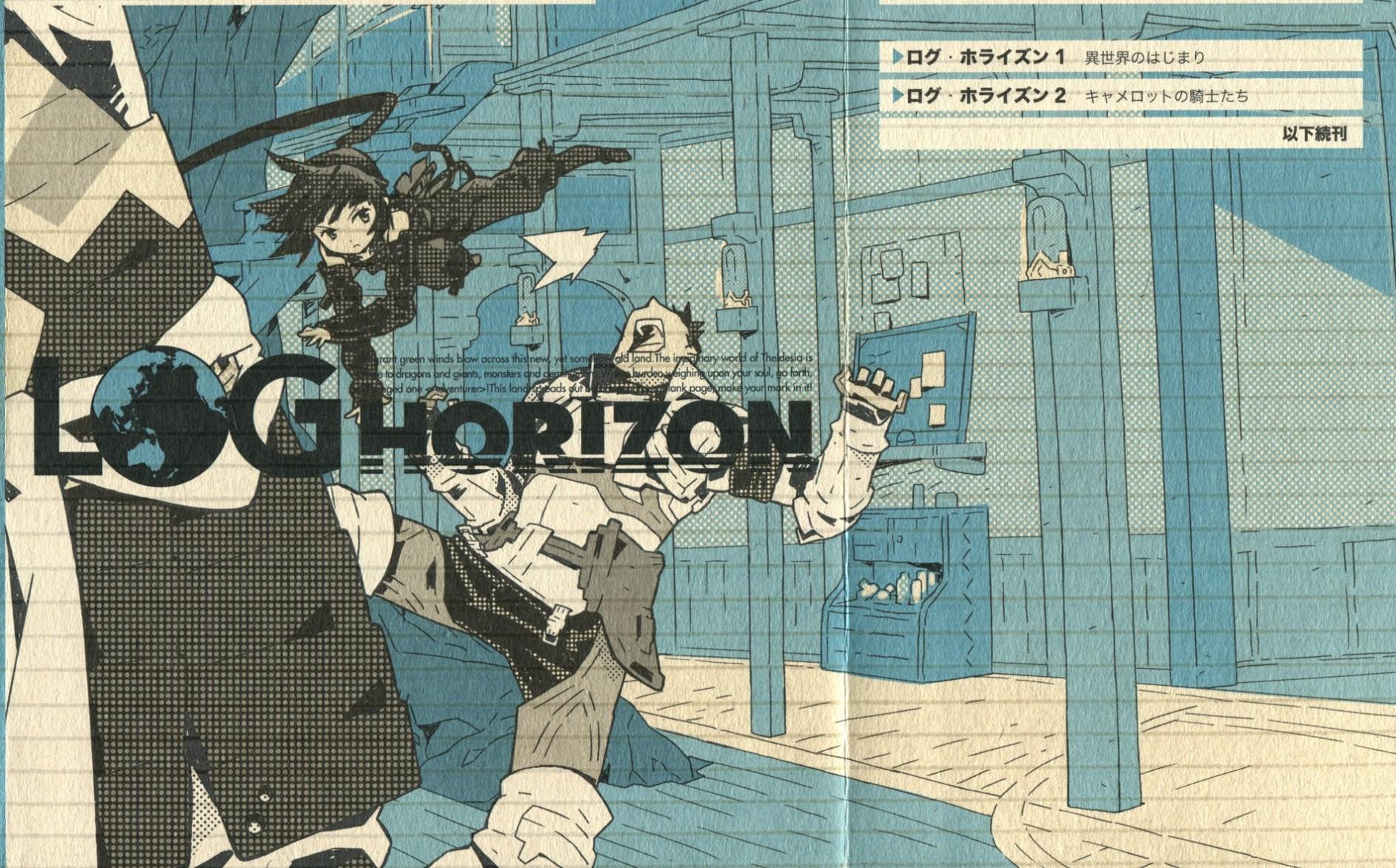
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gent green winds blow across this new, yet somehow old land. The imaginary world of Thedesia is home to dragons and giants, monsters and castles. A heavy burden weighing upon your soul, go forth, and change one adventurer! This land spreads out before you on a blank page, make your mark in it!

橙乃まれ既刊作品

▶まおゆう魔王勇者 1 「この我のものとなれ、勇者よ」「断る!」

▶まおゆう魔王勇者 2 忽鄰塔(クリルタイ)の陰謀

▶まおゆう魔王勇者 3 聖鍵(せいけん)遠征軍

以下続刊

▶ログ・ホライズン 1 異世界のはじまり

▶ログ・ホライズン 2 キャメロットの騎士たち

以下続刊





「今日はお祝いやから！ 飲んで食べて騒いでや！」

〈大災害〉からの日々に気落ちしていたメンバーにとって、

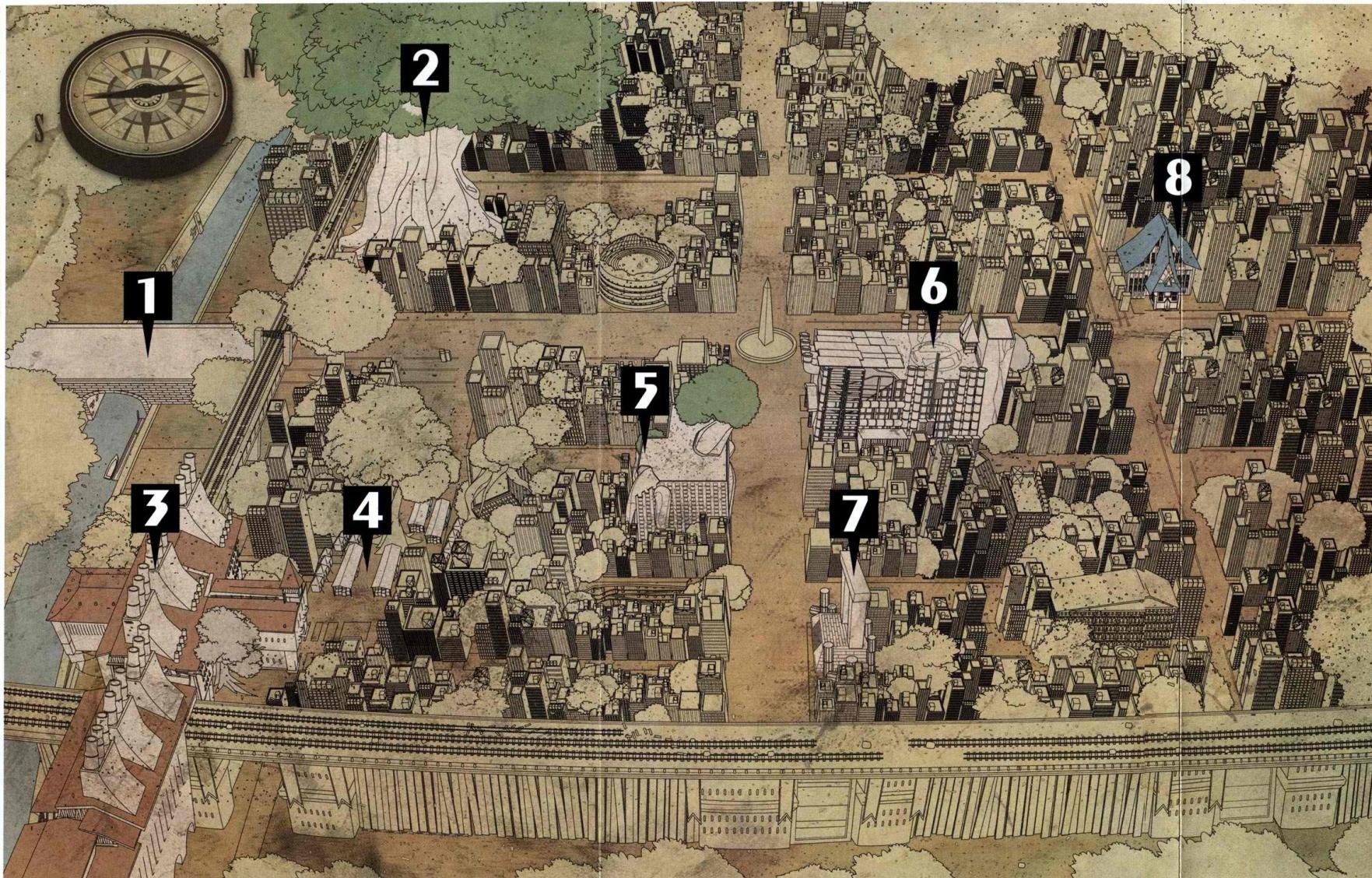
マリエールの明るい宣言はなによりの励ましとして響いた。

Fragrant green winds blow across this new, yet somewhat old land. The imaginary world of Theldesia is home to dragons and giants, monsters and demihumans. With a burden weighing upon your soul, go forth, O winged one! *Adventurer!* This land spreads out before you like a blank page; make your mark in it!

LOG HORIZON

アキバ MAP

AKIBA
CHRONICLE:
AFTER
CATASTROPHE.
01



1 THOUSAND GENERATION BRIDGE

A STYLISH BRIDGE LOCATED AT THE SOUTH END OF AKIBA, THE STARTING POINT FOR ALL ADVENTURERS LEAVING AKIBA. THE STABLES AT THE END OF THE BRIDGE PROVIDE HORSE RENTING SERVICE FOR 5 GOLDS A DAY.

2 SILVER LEAF TREE

PART OF THE LEAVES OF THE GIANT TREE IS DYED SILVER, AS IT IS FLAT AND SPACIOUS AROUND IT, IT IS AN IMPORTANT MEETING AND GATHERING POINT FOR THE ADVENTURERS.

3 OLD AKIBA TRAIN STATION

A BUILDING FOR TRANSPORTATION IN ANCIENT TIMES, THERE ARE BEGINNER LEVEL INGREDIENTS FOR POTIONS INSIDE, THE INTERIOR ARE BUILT LIKE A DUNGEON.

4 OPEN AIR MARKET

IF YOU NEED CONSUMABLES OR DAILY ACCESSORIES, THE OPEN AIR MARKET IS THE PLACE TO GO. IT HAS EVERYTHING FROM FOOD TO POTIONS, BARGAINING WITH THE STALLS IS A JOY FOR VETERAN PLAYERS.

5 AKIBA GUILD BUILDING

AN ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER FOR ALL GUILD AND BANKING MATTERS, A GOOD FRIEND FOR BEGINNER ADVENTURERS! PLEASE ENJOY THE FACILITIES AND CONVENIENCE IT PROVIDES!

6 PRODUCTION GUILD STREET

ADVENTURERS WHO STRIVE TO LEARN PRODUCTION SKILLS PLEASE GATHER HERE, YOU CAN USE ALL SORTS OF PRODUCTION MACHINES FREE OF CHARGE. THE MAJOR GUILDS ALSO PROVIDE SUPPORT IN TERMS OF CHEAP INGREDIENTS.

7 CITY TRANSPORT GATE

A DEVICE THAT TELEPORTS YOU INSTANTLY TO ANY OTHER CITIES, BUT CURRENTLY OUT OF ORDER. THERE IS A MARKET SET UP HERE EVERY WEEK, COME HERE IF YOU WANT TO FIND A GOOD BARGAIN!

8 AKIBA CATHEDRAL

IF YOU ARE UNLIKELY AND LOSE YOUR LIFE DURING YOUR ADVENTURES AND IS UNABLE TO USE RESURRECTION MAGIC, YOU WILL WAKE UP HERE. PLEASE DON'T USE THIS FACILITY TOO MUCH!

LOG HORIZON

ログ・ホライズン

Fragrant green winds blow across this new, yet somehow old land. The imaginary world of Theldesia is home to dragons and giants, monsters and demihumans. With a burden weighing upon your soul, go forth, O winged one <Adventurer>! This land spreads out before you like a blank page, make your mark in it!

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シロエ

▼腹ぐろ眼鏡

おばんつ戦士

直継

美少女暗殺者

アカツキ



以前は女性であることを隠していたが、ゲームの世界に飲み込まれたあとは現実世界と同じ姿を取り戻し、小柄な妻腕暗殺者として活動を開始。

シロエの親友で頼れるガードアイアン。放蕩者の茶会出身の陽気でタフな青年。一時「エルダー・テイル」を休止しており、復帰当日にゲーム世界に閉じ込められた。

伝説のブレイ集団ガードアイアン。放蕩者の茶会で参謀役を務めていた思案派の付与術師。歴戦の古参プレイヤーであるが、中身は引きこもりぎみのハードコアーマー大学生。

「ブリガンティア」との死闘を制した5人は驚獅子に乗組み、アキバを目指して飛び立った。



あらすじ▼

老

舗オンラインゲーム「エルダー・テイル」の世界に日本人ゲーマー3万人が閉じ込められた。

「腹ぐろ眼鏡」の異名をもつ主人公・シロエもそのひとりだ。混乱する廃墟・アキバの街で彼は旧友直継や、暗殺者アカツキ、「三日月同盟」のギルドマスター・マリエと再会を果たす。

そんな折、マリエから「三日月同盟」の初心者メンバー・セララが北のエツゾ帝国で凶悪ギルド「ブリガンティア」に狙われていると相談を受けたシロエらは、セララ救出の旅を決意。

海を越え、セララと合流すると、そこにはシロエの師匠ともいえるにゃん太の姿が。なんと彼がセララを助け匿つていたのだ。

用語解説▼

【大災害】

「エルダー・テイル」のゲーム世界にユーザーが閉じ込められた事件の呼称。12番目の拡張パック「ノウアスフィアの開墾」を導入時にオンラインしていた日本人ユーザー3万人が被害に遭った。

【エルダー・テイル】

「剣と魔法の世界」をモチーフとした世界最大級の大規模オンラインゲーム。玄人好みのMMORPGとして20年の歴史をほこる。

【冒険者】

「エルダー・テイル」をプレイするときのプレイヤーの総称。ゲーム開始時に身長や職業、種族を決定する自分の分身。主にノンプレイヤーキャラクターがプレイヤーのことを指すときに用いる。

【大地人】

ノンプレイヤーキャラクターが自分たちをさす呼称。大災害により、ゲーム時よりも人数が圧倒的に増加した。寝食も普通に必要とし、ステータス画面で確認しないとプレイヤーとの見分けはなかなかつかない。

【ハーフガイア・プロジェクト】

「エルダー・テイル」内で2分の1サイズの地球を作るプロジェクト。地球とほぼ同じ形状をしているが、距離は半分、面積にして4分の1の設定。



〈辛子〉
調味料。傷口にすり込んでは
いけません。



<コンパス>
近くて雷魔法が使われたときの
方向、もしくは北がわかる。



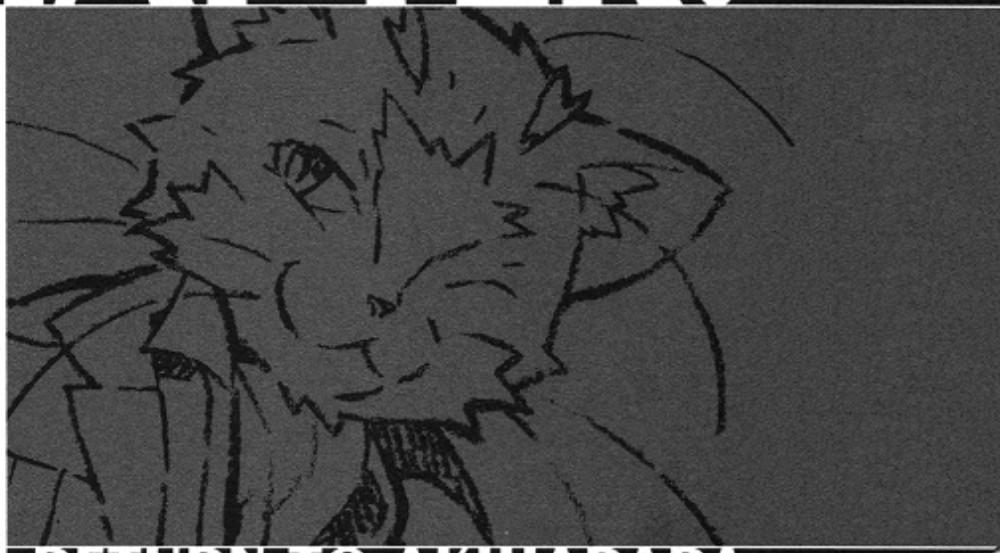
〈茶器〉

マリタ、イマリなど
有名デザイナーズブランド。



〈カエルの置物〉
金運を授かるアイテム。
熊の置物とセットで“どうぞ”。

CHAPTER.



RETURN TO AKIHABARA [アキバへの帰還]

► NAME: NYANTA

► LEVEL: 40

► RACE: WERECAT

► CLASS: SWASHBUCKER

► HP: 10872

► MP: 9477

► ITEM 1:
[FAIRY KING'S LEATHER BELT]

SWORD BELT SAID TO BE
TAILOR-MADE FOR THE
FAIRY KING'S MILITARY
UNIFORM. NOT ONLY
IS IT BEAUTIFUL, IT IS
DESIGNED AND
ADJUSTED SO THAT
THE MOTION OF
UNSHEATHING THE
WEAPON TO ATTACK
IS SMOOTH. INCREASES
CRITICAL RATE ON
PREEMPTIVE ATTACKS.

► ITEM 2:
[BLUE-AND-WHITE FLYCATCHER
ODONATA WING RAPIER]

PRODUCTION-CLASS RAPIER
WHICH REQUIRES A LARGE
QUANTITY OF HIGH LEVEL
INSECT MATERIALS. IT IS
FLEXIBLE BUT IS DIFFICULT
TO DEFEND WITH. ALTHOUGH
IT IS HARD TO GET, ITS
BEAUTIFUL JADE COLOR
AND SHINE OF THE
TRANSPARENT WINGS
MAKES IT VERY POPULAR
AMONGST ADVENTURERS
WHO WANT WEAPONS
THAT LOOK NICE AND
ARE OF HIGH PERFORMANCE.

► ITEM 3:
[CAT FAIRY BOOTS]

STURDY AND SUPPLE
LONG BOOTS LOVED
BY THE CAT FAIRIES.
AN ARTIFACT-CLASS
REWARD AT THE END
OF A LONG QUEST.
SUMMONS A SMALL
CAT FAIRY WHEN YOU
CLICK THE HEELS AND
IT WILL CARRY YOUR
ITEMS.

<table width=60%><tr><td width=20%; valign="top">Name: Nyanta

Race: Werecat

Class: Swashbuckler

HP: 10872

MP: 9477<td>Equipment

Fairy King's Leather Belt

Sword belt said to be tailor-made for the Fairy King's military uniform. Not only is it beautiful, it is designed and adjusted so that unsheathing the weapon to attack is smooth. Increases critical rate on preemptive attacks.

Blue-and-white Flycatcher Odonata Wing Rapier

Production-class rapier which requires a large quantity of high level insect materials. It is flexible but is difficult to defend with. Although it is hard to get, its beautiful jade color and shine of the transparent wing makes it very popular amongst adventurers who want weapons that look nice and are of high performance.

Cat Fairy Boots

Sturdy and supple long boots loved by the cat fairies. Artifact-class item reward at the end of a long quest. Summons a small cat fairy when you click the heels and it will carry your items.

Chapter 01: Return to Akihabara

Part 1

Rose, red, yellow, and orange colored.

Three griffons flew over the ocean that sparkled in the dusk.

The night scene from the east gave the sky a purplish glow. As the sun set in the west, it took the red light with it, leaving a long trail and a beautiful scene.

On the leading griffon, a man in silver armor turned and waved his hands widely with a big smile on his face, signaling something to his companions.

Shiroe saw Naotsugu's signal and gently told the lady behind him, "Hang on tight."

Shiroe signaled the giant 'griffon' he rode with his heel, and it tilted the tip of its 3 meter wing slightly. The monster cut through the air as it slowly glided towards the ground in a smooth arc.

The five who left Susukino - Shiroe, Akatsuki, Naotsugu, Crescent Moon Alliance's young druid Serara, who had been rescued in the mission, and her protector Nyanta, a werecat, had been flying non-stop since their escape, flying across the coast of Ezzo, and moving towards Eastal territory where Akiba was.

As the sun set in the west, darkness covered the world.

Even though they possessed a rare flying mount not available to normal Adventurers, Shiroe's party still wished to get as far away as possible from Susukino and they kept moving late into the evening by normal traveling conventions.

Setting up camp required a lot of effort.

Setting up the tents and preparing food took a lot of time. Because of the general lack of experience with the outdoors, even picking up firewood might take up to an hour.

After the Catastrophe, Shiroe's party learned how to survive in the wilderness of this world, and had not been pushing too hard on their way to Susukino. But after rescuing Serara, they wished to cross the coastline as

fast as possible, going at a pace where pursuers would not be able to catch them.

The three griffons coordinated with each other and took a beautiful curving path to land on a hill.

"I wasn't afraid, ok?"

Holding Shiroe's hand while climbing down the griffon, Akatsuki said with shifty eyes. The truth was, of course that she was still scared, even though she was now used to the sensations of flying.

The thing she was afraid of was the griffon itself.

The griffon had the upper body of an eagle, and the lower body of a lion, with strong wings that spanned between 5 to 6 meters, and with its sharp claws and beak in addition to its big size, it should be able to bite off Akatsuki's head in one bite.

Akatsuki kept her distance after landing. Shiroe smiled, being careful not to let Akatsuki notice, and took a piece of meat from his Bag of Holding to feed the griffon.

Although the beast looked scary, it was very loyal to the Adventurers who summoned them by flute. As Shiroe stroked its neck, it happily swallowed the meat in one bite.

"The mission was a success."

Naotsugu walked uphill towards Shiroe after dismounting from his griffon.

"Correct, your plan was brilliant nya~."

Nyanta and Serara approached Shiroe from the other side.

"Erm, thank you very much, everyone! I am very grateful!"

"Anyway, don't mention it, we didn't do anything great."

Shiroe replied to Serara who bowed her head in gratitude. He also felt his attitude was too cold, but he was tongue-tied, and so just averted his eyes shyly.

Shiroe opened his menu and used telepathy to report to Maryele. Maryele who was waiting anxiously all this while let out a sigh of relief after receiving Shiroe's report.

If you think about it, Shiroe's party forcefully took over Maryele's rescue quest and traveled north.

In the aftermath of the Catastrophe, the city had a gloomy mood, frustrating the populace.

Shiroe took over the rescue quest because he found the mood too depressing.

He was genuinely concerned for the Crescent Moon Alliance, and was happy to help Maryele and Henrietta, but that was not the sole reason. Shiroe had a feeling of irritation deep in his heart.

"Seriously, don't be too concerned."

Shiroe only did what he wanted for himself.

Hence, he could not translate his thoughts into words, and could only speak broken phrases.

"Shiroe-chi has always been shy nya~."

Nyanta spoke in a relaxing and comforting tone.

"Chief Nyanta."

"Shiroe-san and Nyanta-san already knew each other?"

"That's right, and I was their friend too."

Naotsugu interjected.

"That's right nya~, when Elder Tales was still a game, Shiroe-chi, Naotsugu-cci and I used to adventure together nya~."

When it was still a game.

Those words echoed sadly in their hearts.

This was not Elder Tales anymore. The Catastrophe happened, and this was just a world that was similar to Elder Tales, but was ten times harsher.

Serara made a depressed expression, making Shiroe troubled, but he was unable to find the words to comfort her.

"My lord, we need to prepare for camp."

Shiroe felt saved by Akatsuki's suggestion and started the preparations with the others. Nyanta and Serara also understood that being depressed wouldn't help the situation, so they picked themselves up emotionally, and started looking for a suitable place to camp.

The sky was dark, but there was no sign of strong monsters in the area.

Naotsugu and Serara set up a small tent. In this season, there would be no problem sleeping under the stars with sleeping bags, but it would be troubling for them if it rained.

Akatsuki and Nyanta headed towards the forest without a word, probably to pick up firewood.

It was inefficient to prepare to camp this late at night.

Even with magic light illuminating the area, it was slow to set up tents in the dark. The party dug up the grass, set up stones to block the wind, and started the campfire two hours after they landed.

It was possible that they wouldn't get a full night's rest but the five of them were in a happy mood, as they had already succeeded in the most difficult part of the rescue quest.

Since they had crossed several zones using the griffons, they did not need to worry about pursuers. The only thing left on the agenda was to return safely to Akiba, so there was no need to rush, unlike their journey to Susukino.

They could even spend another night here if they wanted to.

The leisurely mood was reflected on the faces of everyone.

Nyanta and Akatsuki headed into the forest that looked more like an overgrown jungle to pick up firewood, Naotsugu headed towards the river for water, and Shiroe and Serara set up tents in the meantime. Canvas tents were not magic items, but were a necessity for adventurers. They

were heavy items, but the weight disappeared when they were placed inside a Bag of Holding, so they were not a hassle to bring along.

Before setting up the tent, Serara contacted Maryele via telepathy.

Maryele always had a happy smile on her face, but that didn't mean she was not worried. When she listened to Shiroe's report, her voice had become shaky with emotion, probably due to a sense of relief.

Maryele was so happy listening to Serara's call, such that even Shiroe, who was packing things outside the tent was able to imagine by Serara's reaction.

"I'm back with the water."

The one walking up the hill was Naotsugu.

He went to the pond and used his bottle to collect water. The sun had set completely, and the forest cast a clear silhouette under the clear night sky. Nyanta and Akatsuki should be back from the forest soon.

No matter how you looked at it, the rescue mission was a success.

Part 2

"What is this? This is fantastic!"

Naotsugu let out an emotional voice.

In front of the five was a campfire.

"My lord my lord, how do I describe this? This is absolute bliss!"

Even the usually emotionless Akatsuki shouted with a red glow on her cheeks.

Naotsugu nodded at them, and Shiroe was not calm at all, but filled with joy. But the socially awkward Shiroe wasn't able to express his happiness to the others.

"Nyahaha, there is still more nya~."

Naotsugu concentrated on his meat, and didn't seem to hear Nyanta's words.

The deer meat was sizzling in the fire, and gave off a splendid aroma.

Such a simple thing was an incredible discovery.

The beginning of the incident started when Akatsuki and Nyanta took down a deer on their way to pick up firewood.

In this world, wild animals were not rare. The human population was only one percent of Japan's overall population, so the wild animals had a good environment in which to breed.

In the forest and hill zones where nature flourished, you could see wild animals like deer, birds, boars and goats. But there were dangerous ones like wild dogs, wolves, and bears too. Especially wild boars and bears, which were as powerful as goblins, so adequate care should be taken.

But if you avoid the dangerous beasts, deer and birds were easy to handle, perfect for low level players to practice on and an important source of food.

Akatsuki and Nyanta hunted a deer on their way to pick up firewood.

Nyanta carved up the deer in front of the bewildered eyes of the rest of the party, and skewered the meat into delicious kebabs.

Looking at the sizzling kebabs cooking in the fire, you could tell it was totally different from the food they had tasted.

The aroma of food.

Only real food could give out such a wonderful smell, which dumbfounded the group. Shiroe and company felt a sudden hunger which they were unable to bear.

Eating the meat that was seasoned with salt and spices by Nyanta, your tongue was assaulted with the sweet taste that fills your whole mouth. This wasn't something you ate to live. This was something you ate to feel alive.

The difference was beyond description.

"Delicious... But why?"

Shiroe was puzzled.

Naotsugu and Akatsuki were also dumbstruck; only Serara and Nyanta smiled proudly.

This was the best food they have had in a month.

'All food has no taste' was one of the cruel phenomenons of this world. Shiroe and the gang... no, the thirty thousand Japanese players all felt sadness because of this.

It doesn't matter if you had omelet rice, curry, soup or grilled fish, the taste was always like 'soggy crackers'; without the taste of salt, it was worse than soggy crackers. Naotsugu described it as eating cardboard.

They had given up hope of fixing this phenomenon, and yet the issue was suddenly solved in front of their eyes.

Nyanta did not create any special dish, he had only carved up a deer, seasoned it with salt and spices, and cooked it in a pan over a fire.

It might not be top class, but compared to the life of 'tasteless soggy crackers,' this was heavenly food.

"This is amazing! Incredible, Chief Nyanta you are the best! My love for you is second only to that of panties!"

"You are exaggerating nya~."

Nyanta took out skewers from his bags and prepared more kebabs. Serara beside him laid out dishes and started to cut onions as a side dish.

"Chief, wait a minute! Nyanta-sensei! What happened? Why does it taste like this? Why doesn't it taste like soggy crackers? Requesting the testimony of the accused!"

Naotsugu held a kebab in each hand as he asked. He seemed wary of Nyanta's guarantee that there was still a lot of meat, and was securing his portions in his hands.

Akatsuki who usually called Naotsugu out as a pervert also said "delicious, wonderful, wonderful" as she put the meat into her mouth.

Nyanta carefully removed the inner organs while he explained.

"When preparing a meal, you need to collect the ingredients, then open the menu to select the food you want to make, correct nya?"

He was describing the basic methods of creating items in Elder Tales.

"Using this method, you will always get food of that taste nya. You just need to collect the ingredients, but do not open the menu. Instead, you just manually cook the food, and it will appear as you know in the real world nya."

Nyanta explained calmly.

"But we..."

Akatsuki said halfway with her mouth full and had to stop to swallow. Shiroe gave her a water bottle, and said:

"We tried that too, but using that method, we would end up with mysterious items. When we grilled fish, it either became black coal or gooey slime... It is impossible to perform normal cooking in this world, right?"

This was Shiroe's knowledge of the world.

Since it was a game, if you didn't use in-game techniques, the actions would fail. This was common knowledge.

"If you are not a chef, or if your chef level is too low, that is what will happen nya~. Even if you use manual cooking, you still need the in-game skills. In other words, those with the Chef subclass can make delicious meals as long as they do it manually nya~."

Nyanta's words shocked Shiroe, and he was finally able to accept it.

If you thought about it, being able to sprinkle salt on food was a weird phenomenon. If you can only make food via menu, even the action of sprinkling salt would need to be done through the menu.

Even if the player doesn't choose to be a Chef as their subclass, they would still have 5 EXP in it. The ability to sprinkle salt was a default skill which was the best players who didn't choose the Chef subclass could do.

"Chief, does that mean..."

"You are right Naotsugu-cchi, I am a Chef nya~. Want another kebab?"

Shiroe and party ate lots of meat under the encouragement of Nyanta.

A mid-size deer was more than enough for a group of five, and should last them for tomorrow as well. Nyanta took out an apple brandy he made in Susukino to celebrate, and the party continued.

Nyanta introduced Serara to the trio once again.

"It is nice to meet you all. I apologize for greeting everybody so late and I am very grateful for everybody's assistance. I am Serara, level 19 Druid, subclass Maid, a beginner in Elder Tales."

Serara bowed her head.

(What an energetic girl.)

A girl's gentle face, small and smooth shoulders with her hair tied behind her that was the impression Shiroe had of her.

"Seems like she is probably one of the top three girls in her class, ranked number three in fact, but has received the most love letters."

"Hmm... What?" - Naotsugu said something that is hard to comment on by someone he had just met for the first time. Serara struggled to find the words to respond. Akatsuki's knee made a sharp sound as it met Naotsugu's face.

"Don't knee people! No kneeing!"

"My lord, there was someone who is rude, so I gave him a flying knee."

"You are reporting after doing it?"

The reason why Naotsugu didn't protect his face was because he was protecting the kebabs in his hands, which made Serara giggle.

"Heehee..."

"Ara, this is Naotsugu, a guardian, reliable and strong."

"But perverted and stupid."

Serara nodded cheerfully at Nyanta's words.

"I saw him in action before, I am sorry for my low-level healing support."

Naotsugu replied,

"Don't worry, that was already a big help."

Serara apologized repeatedly for her low level, but Shiroe felt the same as Naotsugu, acknowledging Serara's commitment and resolve. Anyway, things like levels could be improved with time, so there was no need to apologize.

"Naotsugu-cchi has been like this ever since I met him, don't take it to heart. Also, he was praising you nya~."

"Ah?"

Serara raised her head to look at Nyanta, who smiled gently with squinted eyes.

"Naotsugu-cchi means that you are the most popular girl in class, he has a shy nature nya~."

"Chief, wait a minute, that's not what it means, I like panties more than pretty girls!"

As if to interrupt Naotsugu, Akatsuki's flying knee struck again.

"That hurts shortie, you are getting more cruel!"

"My lord, I kicked the pervert's face in and confiscated his meat."

"Huh? Ah, ah!"

Akatsuki bit into the meat she stole from Naotsugu.

"How did it end like this..."

Nyanta handed a new kebab to the depressed Naotsugu and asked, "What about this young lady nya?" shifting the attention to Akatsuki. Shiroe introduced her to Nyanta.

She had been traveling together with Naotsugu and Shiroe. Akatsuki was an Assassin with sub-class Tracker and was both powerful and reliable. Akatsuki looked seriously at Nyanta and bowed her head to greet Nyanta.

"Teacher, I am Akatsuki."

Naotsugu complained loudly about the difference from his treatment, and Akatsuki stuffed some half-cooked meat into his mouth. The two of them

bickered with each other with words like "shortie" and "pervert" and the rest of the party laughed heartily.

"As for Shiroe-chi, he was the strategist of a group I was in nya~. He is a brilliant young man nya~."

Shiroe nodded his head at Nyanta's introduction, Serara thanked Shiroe all panicky. Shiroe felt that she was a cheerful and nice girl.

How old is she? Shiroe wondered.

In this world, your face was affected by your face in the real word, but your body size and appearance were determined by the game data. So, one shouldn't assume anyone's age by their height as that would be rude and probably wrong as well. Shiroe learned about this from Akatsuki.

From her manner of speech, she didn't sound elderly.

(High school, or maybe middle school?)

Elder Tales was a monthly subscription game, so the average age group was higher than free to play games. But that was only the average, it was not surprising for middle-schoolers to play this game.

If I recall, the twins were also about this age.

The chain of events in the rescue mission had tensed Shiroe up, so maybe it was because the tedious part of the quest was over, or maybe it was the celebratory mood and the food, but Shiroe reminisced of the time before the Catastrophe.

Part 3

Shiroe knew the twins back when Elder Tales was just a game world.

Shiroe was a unique solo player, since a high level enchanter could only be described as unique, based in Akiba, living his daily life in Elder Tales.

After the Debauchery Tea Party dissolved, Shiroe became a true roaming player. This was not a negative description, as he enjoyed this type of gaming life.

In the town center of Akiba, there were people recruiting parties for raids everywhere, using the game server chat channels.

Shiroe would sometimes join a group using this method, or join friends like Maryele in their quests, or even go by himself to explore or collect treasures.

Shiroe's subclass was scribe, a production class, with the ability to duplicate scrolls, maps and magic tomes. In Elder Tales, production was the transformation of ingredients into items, so getting raw ingredients was an important step.

For scribes, the ingredients were paper and ink. For normal scrolls, the cheapest ingredients would do. But for high level magic tomes, you would need ink with magic properties. Making special ink was also the job of scribes, which needed ingredients like dragon's blood or rare minerals.

If you wanted to get rare ingredients, you would need to travel to different places and defeat monsters. Even with the Debauchery Tea Party gone or <her> not dragging Shiroe adventuring around anymore, Shiroe was still busy with all sorts of business.

As Shiroe was living his daily gaming life, the twins were the ones to approach him.

"Niichan, Niichan, please wait a minute!"

"Excuse me, I'm very sorry. Is it convenient for you to talk? We want to find out something."

The twins were only up to Shiroe's shoulder in height.

The boy wore cheap armor with a sword on his back.

The girl wore white robes, holding a staff with bells on it.

"No problem, what's the matter?"

Shiroe remembered that it was in a crowded area of Akiba.

Judging by their equipment, the twins were beginners, using default weapons. From their manner of speech and the sounds of their voices, they were either middle schoolers or younger, giving a child-like feeling.

"My magic is too weak, I am unable to cure Tohya's wounds. I asked someone just now, and he told me to purchase better tomes. But I do not know where to buy them. Can you tell me where to buy them?"

From the choice of words and the voice of the girl, she seemed very well-mannered.

"I also want to learn skills, if you know, then please teach me, Niichan."

The green status bar above the twins showed that the girl was Minori, the boy was Tohya, and both were level 6.

The first quest in Elder Tales was a beginners' tutorial. Players choosing Akiba as their starting city would be sent to Major Colonel's battle training camp to learn the basic controls.

Major Colonel looked like a gentlemen with a white mustache, but you never knew what he would do if he got angry, a troublesome NPC. And his name 'Colonel' was also a military rank, confusing players of his actual rank, and as a result he was quite famous among the players.

Major Colonel's training lasts for about an hour; beginners would reach level 4 after completing the tutorial. Considering this fact, the twins probably began playing either yesterday or today; they were total beginners.

"Is this your first day playing?"

"Yes." "That's right!"

The voice of the twins overlapped each other.

Even though Shiroe was socially awkward, he did not hate other people. He was only wary of people who approached him with ulterior motives.

Because of this, Shiroe did not hate beginners, since they did not understand Shiroe had above average wealth, and they were not concerned with the idea of party efficiency and taking advantage of Shiroe.

Leaving such depressing thoughts behind, Shiroe wished to welcome beginners as a player of Elder Tales, believing it to be the duty of experienced players.

"I see. I will lead you, this way."

Just bringing them though the familiar streets was no trouble, Shiroe thought as he led the twins.

Just like that, Shiroe became friends with Tohya and Minori, teaming up with them occasionally.

Tohya is very outgoing, greeting Shiroe loudly when he saw him in town. Minori on the other hand would thank Shiroe politely.

The two were twins, Minori was the elder sister, being born shortly before her brother. She had the air of a class monitor, taking care of her rude brother, which is how the twins lived.

They were both in their second year of middle school, which was very young from Shiroe's perspective. Shiroe had played the game for a long time, but he seldom met middle schoolers. Because of the generation gap, even when Shiroe met such young players, they didn't have much in common and so wouldn't ally together for raids.

But the twins respected Shiroe and had no problem inviting him to play.

When Shiroe first met them, the twins informed him that Elder Tales was their first MMORPG, and they were very excited.

The first adventure was a disaster.

Tohya was like a homing missile whenever he saw a monster, rushing them immediately, Minori would follow in a hurry, and they would be in for a tough battle that brought them to the verge of tears.

And this scene repeated itself over and over again.

Elder Tales had a 'Mentoring' system.

In simple terms, it lets high-level players play with low-level players by dropping their levels and stats to match the lower level players.

Shiroe was an experienced player with deep insights into the game as well as having top tier equipment. Using the 'Mentoring' system, Shiroe would be roughly one or two levels better than the twins, which was an ideal level to lead the twins as a mentor.

Shiroe would use his spells to disable the enemy, but the attack power of enchanters was low, and even more useless after the level drop. But it was still a big help to the two beginners.

"Thank you, Niichan! Ok, let's attack the enemies over there as well!"

"Tohya, wait a minute, your HP is dropping!"

Shiroe was dragged around by the twins all over the place to play.

Tohya was a samurai of the warrior class.

Elder Tales called magic and fighting skills 'techniques', each of which had a name and values like MP, cast time and cool down. Cast time is the period between selecting the technique and the technique being used. Cool down is the time needed for activated skills to be available for use again.

Most of the samurai's techniques have a long cool down time.

Their techniques were powerful, but most of them can only be used once or twice in a battle, which was the opposite of monks who chained many techniques during a fight.

Samurais were strong for short battles, and could deal the most damage in such situations, which made it a fun class to play.

But on the other hand, if you did not use the techniques with care and activated all your techniques, you would not be able to do anything before their cool down ends. Losing the ability to adapt to sudden changes by exploiting or covering new changes made mastering this class very difficult.

"Let's go! Helmet Slash!"

Tohya charged with his sword raised high, attacking a goblin directly. This damaged the goblin greatly, but Tohya couldn't move for a while after performing this technique.

"Wryyy!" "Growl!" "Hiss!"

The goblins seized the chance to gang up on Tohya. Tohya panicked as he was being attacked, but he was still stuck for the moment.

"Tohya! Retreat, it's dangerous! Protect Shield!"

Minori shook her staff and a barrier blocked the goblin's attack.

Minori was a Kannagi of the healer class.

A healer's duty included recovering HP, removing status ailments and using various spells to support allies.

All three of the healer classes had the ability to recover HP, and they all had their own unique skills as well.

Channeling the power of the ancient gods, kannagis specialized in blocking damage, setting up barriers protecting a single ally or the whole group. The barriers could negate a set amount of damage before breaking.

By looking at healing powers, kannagi was the least powerful of the healer classes. But the potential of negating damage could give a huge advantage in the right situation.

On the other hand, this technique depended on the user's ability to predict the type and range of the enemy, and was hard to master.

All the classes in Elder Tales were designed to be difficult to master, but the twins were not concerned with it, and were just enjoying the game.

Shiroe took the twins all over the beginner levels around Akiba at the request of the twins, accompanying them to the shops and answering all of their questions.

Shiroe once asked them: "I have better gear, how about I give them to you?" Even though it was good gear, it was only about level 10; Shiroe at level 90 had no problem buying a few hundred sets.

But Tohya replied, "Nah, I don't want it, I already started playing. Collecting treasures is the most interesting part, if I were to receive gear for no reason, then what is the point of playing?"

Minori said: "I apologize for my brother's arrogance, I am very sorry. Shiroe-san you have been very kind to us, but rather than giving us items, we would be happier if you continued playing with us!"

Because it was these twins, Shiroe could also play the role of mentor. The twins would also not view Shiroe as someone to take advantage of, so it was a joy playing with them.

Days like this continued. Until the Catastrophe.

"Oh, so you knew a pair of twins, and what else?"

"What?"

"My lord, do you know how they are doing now?"

Shiroe talked about his encounter with the twins, and his teammates raised this question.

Under the orange light of the campfire, the group's shadow danced on the tent, giving a calm camping atmosphere.

"They are online. I have seen them a few times after the Catastrophe."

"So they are stuck here too."

"We were together shortly before, and we were dragged back to Akiba. We got separated right then."

When the Catastrophe happened, all players were forcefully sent to the nearest village. Serara and Nyanta seemed deep in thought recalling the incident.

"Maybe you should have contacted them. They are probably deeply troubled too. They are just beginners and yet they are caught in this hellish event." Naotsugu said.

Shiroe knew that the Debauchery Tea Party was full of generous and helpful people, especially Naotsugu who diligently looked after his juniors and beginners.

(A guardian who protects his teammates must be a guy who gives his all in helping others. But for Naotsugu, his way of expressing himself might affect his image.)

"Anyway, Shiroe-chi also has things he needs to attend to nya."

Nyanta said as he poured hot tea into a metal mug. This was not real tea, just a drink made with fragrant dried leaves and apple peelings. But to people who have been drinking tasteless water, this was bliss. Akatsuki nursed the mug carefully to warm her hands.

"You are right. In the beginning, we could only take care of ourselves, unable to spare any effort to take care of others. By the time I met them again, they had already joined a guild."

Not just Shiroe, all the players also didn't have the energy to consider things other than themselves.

"Is that so..."

"At that time, all the guilds were also busy recruiting people."

Akatsuki's words reminded Naotsugu of the situation and he nodded his head.

"I remember they were about level 20?"

"I think they should have progressed a bit more since then."

"Then it is a good thing they joined a guild, since they can't take care of themselves."

Naotsugu stretched himself as he talked, then turned and faced Shiroe.

"And so, is Minori cute?"

"Ah?"

Shiroe started recalling. He only saw their avatars in the Elder Tales game, and the screen only displayed a standard character model, so there was no way to know if she was cute. Shiroe had not talked with them face-to-face after the Catastrophe, so Shiroe was unable to answer.

"Nope, for this kind of thing you don't need to see her in person. You have talked to her through voice chat right? You know whether she is cute from her voice right?"

Naotsugu pressed Shiroe.

Akatsuki was speechless, listening to their conversation, throwing them a cold look.

Shiroe looked toward Nyanta, the only one who could save him.

"Serara-chi, are you cold?" Nyanta displayed the concern of a gentleman. Can you spare some chivalry for your old friend too? As Shiroe thought about this, Naotsugu pressed on.

"Hmmm... To judge if she is cute... Her manner of speech is polite like a little girl... Feels like she is from a high class family? I feel that her family is high class, but not like Henrietta-san."

As Shiroe talked, Naotsugu nodded at his every word with a happy look.

"That's right! That is how a middle schooler should behave!"

"Why did you guess her age now?"

"Stupid Naotsugu..."

You are correct! Shiroe nodded at Akatsuki, but she just said "My lord is also stupid."

"Let's contact them after we go back! A date, I will be the vanguard, Shiroe will be the backup! Girls are great!"

"This I agree with you."

"Shiro likes panties too right?"

"Not particularly. My interest in panties is at the average level among males."

Naotsugu's suggestion made Shiroe feel troubled, but he still agreed. It was not contacting the twins that was troubling, but getting ready for the punch line with Naotsugu that was troublesome. But it could not be helped.

Naotsugu had been bullied by Akatsuki a lot lately, so there was a need to be gentle with him.

The party carried on late into the night.

Guild matters, each others' experiences, delicious food, the star of the world, the group kept on chatting deep into the night.

Enjoying the feast in the orange glow, their laughter overlapped, the atmosphere was relaxing and no one wanted to call it a night.

Akatsuki and Serara leaned towards each other as they dozed off. The two of them were very cute, and even the constantly bullied Naotsugu smiled as he covered them with blankets.

When Nyanta finally declared it was time for bed, the sun was already rising from the east.

"Ah, I am so full! It's been a while since I have had such a good meal! Just this meal is worth the trip to Ezzo. This is what traveling should be like!"

Naotsugu's footsteps were wobbly because of sleepiness and breakfast, but his words resonated with his companions.

The five of them slipped into their sleeping bags, enjoying the warmth of the campfire as they dreamed.

Part 5

The journey started anew the next day.

Shiroe's group completed the quest with just three people.

With the addition of the excellent melee attacker Nyanta and Serara the druid who could heal minor wounds, the group was even more prepared for battle.

Even so, they did not rush in getting back.

In fact, the group intentionally slowed their return speed, sleeping late into the morning after the first night. They chose the best timing to ride the griffons which could only be used for 4 hours before proceeding on horseback.

They broke for camp early in the evening and built their tent before the sunset, leaving plenty of time for dinner preparation. The food was all ingredients from the wild, but it was still a feast when compared to the food they had before.

Nyanta put in lots of effort in preparing the meals, with his soup being the favorite.

The group chatted about all sort of things.

Serara did not go into detail of her troubles in Susukino, but even if she was traumatized, she had now overcome it, and the group was relieved that she was ok.

Unexpectedly, Serara liked Nyanta, but Nyanta didn't seem to realize it. But Serara seemed to think she hid her affection very well and no one realized it yet, which amused the others greatly.

Whenever Serara left Nyanta's side, she would sneak a peek at him. During dinner, she would sit beside Nyanta with a gleeful expression on her face.

The best news for Serara was when Nyanta said he would accompany her to Akiba and settle down there. When Serara heard that, she hugged Nyanta tightly, almost knocking over the pots.



Seeing Serara like this, Naotsugu made a mischievous face. Even though Shiroe thought that was not cool, he understood Naotsugu's feelings.

Nyanta always claimed to be an old man in the Debauchery Tea Party, and had never had any scandals. For the two former-Tea Party members, this was a spectacular piece of news.

"But come to think of it, why would she like a middle aged man..."

"Naotsugu, you are too much, we are talking about the Chief here. That is the charm of the Chief."

"Serara has good taste."

The two of them laughed as Akatsuki replied.

"Akatsuki feels that Nyanta is OK too?"

"Teacher is a first-class swordsman."

A mildly shocked Shiroe asked, and Akatsuki dutifully answered. This answer was vague with regards to Nyanta's charm, so it should be Akatsuki's respect for Nyanta as a fellow melee fighter, and Shiroe accepted this answer.

In terms of maturity, Nyanta was very reliable.

He claimed to be an old man, but that was in comparison with the younger kids. He should be about 40. He was skinny and tall, had small eyes, but looked good on the whole.

(Hmm, so Nyanta is OK too.)

Shiroe had the habit of putting his fingers on his chin when he was thinking. Akatsuki thought of something and approached Shiroe, tugging at his sleeve.

"My lord, my lord."

"What is it."

"My lord is not a swordsman, but I think you are strong."

"She is comforting me." Shiroe realized this and thanked Akatsuki while gently patting her hair. Akatsuki showed a troubled expression and said, "I

didn't say anything worthy of thanks", and turned her head away. Shiroe felt a tug at his heart.^[1]

As the group flew over the Yappa highlands, dark clouds approached from the southwest. Naotsugu could see bits of white in the clouds rolling in.

"Shiro! Chief Nyanta!"

Too lazy to use telepathy, he shouted directly at his companions who were flying about 10 meters below him.

"There's a storm coming!"

Shiroe looked to the west after hearing Naotsugu. The sunlight had been blocked by the clouds, and the air was heavy, and the griffons had difficulty maintaining altitude.

"Shiroe-chi, it's a bit early, but let's look for shelter nya."

Nyanta calmly advised Shiroe through telepathy. Checking the directions of the clouds again, Shiroe raised his right hand, and they started to drop in altitude.

Shiroe flew towards a village on the Yappa highlands, which had about 20 buildings in the junction of several unpaved roads.^[2]

Just as the griffons landed, thunder boomed and the weather changed in a blink of an eye.

The party rushed into the center of the village.

This was a typical village that can be found anywhere in all five Japanese servers.

The setting of Elder Tales was that of a world with a destroyed ancient civilization, the environment regained its vibrancy over thousands of years as flora and fauna flourished. Farming was possible in areas where there were less monsters.

The people living here were not Adventurers, but NPCs who called themselves People of the Land.

A majority of Elder Tales' game quests involved visiting these villages and solving various problems for the people, with stories involving the villagers as the background.

Noticing the sudden change in weather, a woman wearing a white blouse and a kid with a dog and a cow jogged across the village roads.

Villagers of various age and dress collected their farm tools and rushed to get all the sheep back into their sheds.

As Shiroe predicted, the large building in the center of the village was the town hall, which was common for such frontier villages.

"Hello!"

Naotsugu greeted loudly as he led the group into the town hall which smelled of dry grass.

"Coming! Are you travelers?"

A NPC elderly man introduced himself as one of the village elder. He had short white hair and glasses with thick lenses, he seemed to be about 60 years of age. But his back was straight and he had a build of a younger man. He calmly listened to Shiroe's introduction and explanation and offered to provide shelter for the group at a cheap price for the night. The group thanked the old man and went into the shed.

This seemed to be a place to store hay for the winter, with stacks of them placed all over the place. The summer rain was not cold, but was falling down hard, sounding like golf balls were striking the village.

Shiroe stood at the doorway looking at the sky, and a cheerful voice boomed behind him.

"This is great, I love hay!"

Naotsugu shouted happily.

This world inherited the convenience of the game world, with the sleeping bags and tent being of amazing quality. Even though you can sleep comfortably, at the end of the day it was still a sleeping bag, and you would lose body heat and become stiff after one night.

In comparison, sleeping on hay was as comfortable as sleeping on a hotel bed.

"That's right, it is a comfortable place to be in nya."

Nyanta said as he inspected the interior, windows and the doors. Even though it was made of wood, the wall had been painted with some form of concrete to block the wind, so the shed remained dry and cool with a clean smell.

With the rain pouring down so heavily, being in the village was a great stroke of luck.

"Is there any place we can start a fire nya?"

"I see a stove over there Nyanta-san!"

Worried about dinner, Nyanta left the shed following Serara. Naotsugu and Akatsuki left the problem of dinner to them and started making five hay beds for the group.

"Why is this bed so small? Is it a bed for a hamster?"

"Shut up Stupid Naotsugu, go make your bed in the corner!"

Shiroe smiled awkwardly as he listened to the two bicker while the elder approached him.

"Are you from Tsukuba? Are you Adventurers?"

"Yes, we are Adventurers, we are on our way to Akiba."

Shiroe replied. 'Adventurer' was the term NPCs used to describe player characters.

"Would you like a drink?"

"Thank you very much... Is this... tea?"

Shiroe took out the tea made by Nyanta from his Bag of Holding and poured a cup for the elder in a metal mug, while he poured a cup into the flask cap. He sat on a sawing table while the elder sat on a wooden stool.

"How is it?"

Maybe it was because he experienced it for the first time, the elder was surprised at the bittersweet flavor of the tea. The elder praised the quality of the tea as Shiroe smiled.

"Why are you making this bed so carefully?"

"This is my lord's bed, of course it needs to be done with care."

"Oh I see, it must be hard making a bed for normal-sized people right?"

"Don't look down on me you pervert!"

Naotsugu and Akatsuki continued to bicker as they made the beds, while Shiroe and the elder chatted with the bickering as background music. The roads had been reduced to mud tracks, but from the reaction of the elder, the rain was nothing out of the norm.

"Your companions sure are energetic."

"Yes they are, I apologize for the disturbance."

"Don't say that, if you are going to travel, you need this kind of energy. But since you are Adventurers, this is to be expected."

The biggest change that occurred after the Catastrophe was the change in the NPCs.

The NPCs in Elder Tales were the same as other games, and they did not possess their own personalities. Although they were better programmed than other RPGs, they were limited by their AI in their conversation with the players.

But after the Catastrophe, NPCs appeared to be the same as normal people. Members of Brigandia may disagree, but Shiroe believed it to be so.

They could think, breathe, eat, and were alive.

They could drink tea together and talk about all kinds of topics. Each of them had their unique names and memories. They were not humans, they were not monsters, but they were an important element in the world.

Shiroe's party had been training in the wild most of the time after the Catastrophe, spending little time in Akiba.

Furthermore, NPCs were fewer in numbers in a Adventurer city like Akiba.

Hence, Shiroe didn't have a chance to interact with NPCs, but chatting like this made Shiroe think they were more and more human.

"The People of the Land seldom travel."

The elder said as he looked at Akatsuki with peaceful eyes.

The People of the Land was not a term describing humans, elves or dwarfs, but used to differentiate between Players and NPCs.

When Elder Tales was just a game, this term was already in place, but seldom used by players, who referred to them simply as NPCs.

But it was different now.

"People of the Land..."

"Yes, and this is a good village, we can live here with no worries."

They referred to players as Adventurers, and viewed them with fear. In their minds, Adventurers had a different culture, and their abilities were totally on another level.

Adventurers would grow stronger as they experienced battles, gaining powers hundreds of time more powerful, and possessed an undying soul. They did not disappear when they received fatal injuries, and would revive after returning to the cathedral. They could travel to places all over the world and even win battles against giants, the undead, and dragons.

Beings with such an incredible existence were known as Adventurers.

People of the Land did not have such battle prowess, they would fall when injured, could not revive when they died, representing the common folks in this world.

But there were NPCs who had equal or greater strength than players because of the game setting. The People of the Land viewed them as being different from themselves and Adventurers, calling them Ancients.

If you categorized them this way, People of the Land were the most helpless. If Adventurers wished to, they could take all their belongings and even their lives.

After the Catastrophe caused the increase in population, the amount of People of the Land increased 5 to 10 fold, but the difference in battle prowess remained the same.

From what Shiroe observed, they did not bear any grudge about this, treating this as a natural phenomenon. Because for them, this was the world they lived in, it had always been like this.

(From the name People of the Land, that should be the way. They live and are at one with the land, which I can never match up to them.)

As Shiroe chatted randomly with the elder, this was what Shiroe felt. How many People of the Land were there in the world? There must be at least a hundred villages like this in Yappa.

(We have no knowledge about the People of the Land. We don't even know what they eat or do for leisure... We are really lacking in this front...)

Shiroe felt a deep curiosity to question the elder, but a cheerful voice broke his train of thought.

"Good news Shiroe-chi nya!"

Nyanta approached with Serara beaming at his side. It seemed like she already knew what the good news was.

"What is it?"

"We went to visit a few households in the area, and they sold ingredients to us nya!"

"It's wonderful! This is milk, this is cheese, and we have sausage bacon and eggs! There are even eggs! I bought sugar back in Susukino, so we can bake cookies!"

"We also brought cabbage and potatoes nya."

The couple showed their goods with pride. With so many ingredients, we won't need to hunt on the way back to Akiba anymore.

"Is this OK?"

Shiroe inquired to the elder. The elder nodded in agreement.

"The weather in spring is good, our livestock is abundant. The villagers would be happy to exchange them for some coins. By the way, I have a barrel of strawberry jam, would you like to buy some?"

The elder added. He must be happy for the chance to earn some coin.

"I would be happy to."

Shiroe followed the elder who led the way.

Part 6

Tohya wiped the mud off his face with his left hand.

His gauntlets were made from animal skin and wires, so it hurt when they rubbed against your face. But this amount of pain was just right.

The pain was enough to stop his tears from falling.

"Faster, stop dragging your feet!"

The party leader bellowed in an angry voice.

As usual, he was angry because of the formation falling apart.

Tohya could understand this feeling. Tohya was a samurai, one of the three warrior classes, which served as a tank.

Tank refers to vanguards at the frontline of the formation. Any team has at least one tank. They are responsible for aggravating the monsters and withstanding their attacks. This would free up the damage dealers who could position themselves to maximize their damage potential without fear of attacks.

There are two important aspects to being a tank. First was that you must not die. If the tank dies, there would be no one left to keep the monsters at bay, leaving the mages and healers, who were weak to attacks, open, and the formation would crumble. The second was the need to draw the enemies' attention to yourself to ensure your teammates' safety. If you did not draw their attention, there would be no point even if you did not die, as your teammates would be attacked, leading to the formation collapsing.

(Shiroe-niichan taught me before, I understand the basic concepts, but...)

Even if you understood the concept, putting it into action was a different matter.

Keeping the formation in place was the duty and the reason for tanks to exist. Tohya was also unwilling to endanger his party. But this was also dependent on the support of his group.

In order to keep the tank alive, support and healing was necessary. Even the hardest tank would fall under the constant attacks of monsters. To avoid this, support and healing from the back was needed, and the tank needed to draw the monsters' attention so the healers could concentrate on healing.

They were two sides of a coin, missing any one of them would result in Tohya dying and the formation breaking.

As well as attracting the attention of the enemies, tanks needed to aggravate the enemy more than his teammates, making himself the prime target. Warrior classes had many skills that attracted the enemies' attention, known as taunts. They were able to control the psyche of the enemies, making them lose track of the warrior's teammates' presence.

After attracting their attention, the problem would lie in having the guts, presence of mind, and trust in the healing of your allies. Tohya trusted Minori, so this should be simple.

(That is what Shiroe-niichan said... but that is not enough...)

Usually, if the powers of the group are about the same, the warrior's taunt could operate without issue. But if there was an ally who was higher level than the tanks, or if the damage of the attack was too powerful to handle, then the taunt would not work.

In other words, the enemy would judge the high level damage dealer or healer to be a bigger threat and prioritize them as the target. This was the case for Tohya's team.

The leader of the group was level 46, halfway to the level cap in Elder Tales, and twice the level of Tohya.

Compared to his power as a summoner, Tohya's ability to hold the enemies' attention was inadequate. The enemy would judge the summoner as a bigger threat than Tohya.

The powerful attacks of the leader aggravated the monsters, who then switched priorities from Tohya to him. But even though the leader was twice the level of Tohya, his defense was lower than his.

Because the damage was split between the two of them, the healer would need to heal on both fronts. The effectiveness of the heals would drop and they ran the risk of losing on either front.

As things didn't go as planned, the formation would also become a mess. Damage dealers would not know which enemy to prioritize in order to salvage the situation. Should they target the enemy attacking Tohya or the summoner? The confusion resulted in the team not concentrating on their attacks in order to take down enemies one at a time.

This caused the battle to drag out, causing the formation to worsen, a vicious cycle.

(That's why Shiroe-niichan used the mentoring system to avoid aggravating the monsters.)

Tohya finally understood Shiroe's reasoning.

Shiroe did not use the system because of vanity or pity for the twins. He did it because this was the way to teach battle formations.

Speaking of which, his current leader was different.

Today's grinding spot consisted of level 25 lizard men. For Tohya and the other beginners, that was a high level.

But to the leader, monsters 20 levels below him were easy. He was unable to tolerate taking much time to finish them off. He spoke plainly to the team before: "You should be the one to adjust to me, not the other way around."

As for the leader, he was just a nanny forced to babysit the scrubs and earn gold for the guild. He risked getting a warning from higher management if he didn't meet their targets.

Tohya and the rest were just a burden in his eyes.

The leader in the red robe did not bother to conceal his frustration.

Tohya's teammates were exhausted, with hollow and tired eyes.

There were 4 deaths today. The trips to and from the cathedral annoyed the leader even more.

Despite all of this, he refused to change his ways. If he used the mentoring system, he would be able to achieve balance in his formation, but he was unable to stand the idea of lowering his level. "Doing this will make things slower, and we won't be able to reach the target."

In the alley of Akiba, a bard tripped and almost fell.

"I'm sorry... I'm losing strength in my legs."

The girl apologized to Tohya who stopped her fall. There was only exhaustion and a deep hollowness in her eyes.

"We are almost there, you can do it."

Tohya helped the girl as he cheered her on. She was a level or two below Tohya. She was very light, and her cloak smelled of sweat and dirt. Tohya was the same. They did not have the time or energy for showers.

(This must be hard on her.)

Tohya looked at the girl, who had no strength to be concerned with her appearance, just counting her footsteps to distract herself from falling due to exhaustion.

Tohya bit his lips.

How did it come to this? He has thought of this over and over again, unable to find his way through his anger and confusion.

The group gathered in the city square under the guide of the leader. The leader snarled at the group and collected the day's bounty from each member.

Even in the guild houses, there were still limits to how many items you could store. Items that were not worth keeping were sold in the market, this was the style of Hamelin.

"Tohya, you collected so much."

Leader said in an irritating tone. Tohya may be a low level warrior, but his arm strength was still stronger than his allies', so he could carry more items. This was just his way of shouldering his teammates' burden.

"I brought this back using all my effort."

The leader surely understood this. Tohya didn't look at him straight as he answered. Even if he had the urge to punch him, he knew that fighting was prohibited in this zone. His teammate was exhausted anyway, so he did not want to cause a scene and waste their precious resting time.

"Hmph."

The leader snorted loudly as he put all the collected items into the market.

"For people of your caliber, you can only collect worthless items such as this. You should be grateful that you get to eat anything at all. You should also be thankful for the 'Holy water' too."

Tohya ground his teeth loudly.

All of this was for Minori.

If Minori was not held hostage in the guild house, he would never allow any bad guy to talk so arrogantly. Tohya could feel the hatred in his eyes, as his anger grew in his heart. He shifted his gaze to the streets to avoid detection.

His leader was only a low level member.

(Killing scum like this will only dirty my blade... How long will days like this last? How did it come to this? Why are we in this situation... We don't need 'Holy water', we don't want stuff like that, just take it if you want. But Minori was at her limits, if we didn't join a guild...)

"... Just came back. Yes, thank you... It's OK."

A white light entered Tohya's dusty and gray world. It's a voice that he missed so much in just a month, he almost forgot Shiroe's calm manner of speaking.

Tohya raised his head and searched the streets with his eyes.

Shops... Nope. Open air market... Nope. Blacksmith... Nope. Weapon store, armor store, bar, hotel... searching everywhere for that familiar presence... and feeling hopelessness. Tohya didn't know what he looked like.

Tohya only knew his voice through voice chat, he didn't know how he looked after the Catastrophe. Realizing this, Tohya felt a depressing feeling squeeze his heart.

But a loud group of about ten plus people entered from a door which connected the central square and the main street, drawing the attention of Tohya. A small crowd surrounded a well-traveled group that appeared to have just returned to the city.

Even though he was at the center of the attention, his expression was still moody and troubled. That young man was Shiroe.

"Don't worry! The chef I knew went out of his mind after hearing about it. Every day was a taste-testing storm. In English the word will be "storm". When I mentioned Shiro-bou was coming back, he started preparing for a big party!"

"Wow, there will be a feast? I will be looking forward to it!"

"That's wonderful nya."

"Maryele, there is no need to make such a big deal."

Tohya rushed to open the menu in his mind. He stopped the cursor on the man in front of him to ascertain his name by using the system. Guild: Nil. Name: Shiroe. Class: Enchanter. He was the one that spent his time with him and Minori, sharing his experience and knowledge freely, the one he and Minori addressed as "Niichan".^[3]

"Niichan-

Tohya shouted, but he froze midway.

Shiroe seemed to turn his head and looked his way.

Maybe it was his mind playing tricks on him, but the Shiroe that was facing Tohya seemed to give the sense of more determination.

Shiroe was also living in this post Catastrophe world.

The moment Tohya felt this, he felt a shock and his words froze.

The world had changed.

After the Catastrophe, the world had turned onto a different path and changed irreversibly. This was a world dreamers longed for, and it was a game becoming reality, an incident that only occurred in fairy tales.

But if you looked beyond the surface, the truth was this was a grey prison.

"This is a guild that helps beginners," tempted by these words, the twins who fell into this trap were also at fault. But if you ignore this point, Tohya thought this world was where only the strong would rule.

Money, items, EXP, all these resources allowed the owner to gain more benefits. The rich become richer, those with items gained more items, and those with more EXP could fight monsters that yielded more EXP. It was survival of the fittest.

'Those who have' would gain more, 'those who don't' would always be one step behind and could only watch the dust of 'those who have'. This was the world of Elder Tales, the truth behind the online game world. Now that it was reality, this cruel fact was emphasized even more, because the players could no longer log out.

Tohya's childish logic was unable to comprehend this truth fully. But despite that, he was able to smell this truth because of his childish innocence.

There was no difference.

In any place in any world, this was the law of nature. Since it was a survival of the fittest, the strong and the weak would need to be differentiated. It was not cruel because it was a game. The original world was just as cruel. Excessive squeezing and double standards was prohibited, but that didn't mean it didn't happen.

Tohya understood this logic.

His legs that couldn't move understood this logic.

Minori and Tohya were both beginners.

They had low fighting prowess and had limited knowledge of the world. They had no wealth, and all this meant that they were powerless.

No one understood this more than himself. Not only was he powerless, but he was also a child. Tohya thought he tasted the iron in his blood as he bit his lips. The weak didn't have the strength to protect themselves. Miracles that could save the weak without asking for anything in return do not exist.

The words Tohya swallowed, was it "help me" or "save me"? Even Tohya wasn't sure.

Tohya was sure that Shiroe was a high level gamer, more knowledgeable than anyone in Elder Tales. Maybe he thought that Shiroe would save him regardless of how deep in trouble Tohya was.

But, why did he think that?

He, Shiroe, was just a random guy who played Elder Tales with him for a week, just a friend at the most. Did Tohya have the right to request for his aid?

For example, a debtor wouldn't request help from people that were not related to him by blood. Reality was such a thing, Tohya understood this concept.

Even Shiroe needed to pay a price to continue living in this world.

There was no room for such naive thoughts.

Tohya lowered his clenched fist.

He did not know when the city square started drizzling.

CHAPTER.



► NAME: TOHYA

► LEVEL: 6

► RACE: HUMAN

► CLASS: SAMURAI

► HP: 668

► MP: 331

► ITEM 1:

[CERTAIN KILL UNSIGNED KATANA]

KATANA EXCLUSIVELY FOR SAMURAI HIGHER THAN LEVEL 10. WHILE THE UNSIGNED KATANA IS CHEAPLY SOLD FROM STORES, THIS IS A VERY BASIC MAGICAL-CLASS WEAPON. THE PREFIX 'CERTAIN KILL' RAISES CRITICAL RATE SLIGHTLY.



► ITEM 2:

[KAKISHIBU GAITERS]

JAPANESE-STYLE ARMOR PROTECTING THE LOWER BODY. FERMENTED TANNIN JUICE FROM AN UNRIPE PERSIMMON IS A PRESERVATIVE AND OFFERS WATER-PROOFING AND RESISTANCE AGAINST COLD ATTACKS DUE TO IT BEING A GAITER. ITS EFFECTS AREN'T VERY STRONG SINCE IT BEING LOW LEVEL EQUIPMENT.



► ITEM 3:

[WOLF FANG NETSUKE]

ACCESSORY REWARD FOR COMPLETING THE BEGINNER QUEST 'WOLF PACK ATTACK'. RAISES STRENGTH SLIGHTLY WHEN EQUIPPED. TOHYA KEEPS IT AS A MEMENTO OF TRAINING WITH SHIPOE, EVEN THOUGH THE ITEM HOLDS NO RARITY VALUE.



<table width=60%><tr><td width=20%; valign="top">Name: Tohya

Level: 6

Race: Human

Class: Samurai

HP: 668

MP: 331<td>Equipment:

Sure-Kill Unnamed Katana

Only level 10 and above can equip, two-handed sword for samurai. Unnamed Katana is a cheap weapon sold in the market. This weapon is an enhanced version of the unnamed katana. The prefix "Sure-Kill" increases the chance of critical hits.

Tree Paint Leggings

Japanese armour that protects the lower body. Tree paint is strong against water. The leggings are strong against cold attacks, but are not very effective due to its low level.

Wolf Fang Necklace Pendant -

A reward for completing the wolf pack attack beginner quest. Slight increase in arm strength on equip. Worthless, but Tohya treasures it as a memento of Shiroe's tutelage.

Chapter 02: Determination

Part 1

Guilds. Formed by Adventurers with no limit in size, it was a system used by Elder Tales' players to interact with each other. Players who had not joined any guild could form a permanent bond by forming a guild with two or more members. Adventurers in the same guild shared a common guild bank account, group chat, and other unique functions.

The guild hall was one of these unique functions, referring to a zone leased to a guild.

For example, Akiba's guild building provided guild halls of 4 varying sizes: 3 rooms, 7 rooms, 15 rooms and 31 rooms, allowing it to accommodate guilds of different sizes. It allowed guild members to store items that could not fit into the personal storage banks of individual players, as well as production materials and equipment.

Large guilds may even opt to use a whole building as its guild hall.

The game story of Elder Tales was set in the future of Earth, and utilized the half Gaia project, simulating the many abandoned buildings and ruins of Akiba. These ruins were empty, and could be purchased by an individual or a guild if they had enough money.

For such zones, players were able to control the area as they pleased, including toggling the "battle allowed" option or banning undesirables from entering.

Some guilds would buy a whole building to serve as their HQ.

The Crescent Moon Alliance guild hall was B class with 7 rooms.

It was not spacious, but the facilities were enough for a guild of this size to operate. 4 rooms, 1 workshop, 1 storehouse, and 1 meeting room. Maryele described it as convenient to use.

Even though it was dubbed the meeting room, there was only space for 15 people. Even if everybody in the guild and Shiroe's party squeeze in, there was simply no room for the 30 people to have any meaningful activities.

To solve the issue of space, Maryele and her guild members decorated all the rooms except the storage room for Serara's welcome party.

Floral decorations could be seen everywhere. The work tables were covered with table cloths. They cleaned every corner of the guild. Coffee tables and plenty of cushions were placed everywhere for people to gather and chat. There was even a row of chairs placed along the corridors.

These furniture were not high quality items, but they were made through the hard work of the guild members themselves.

When Shiroe's party arrived in the city, the Crescent Moon Alliance members received them happily at the gate and escorted them back to the guild hall. As they had been keeping in contact via telepathy, the guild members knew Serara's time of return days in advance.

The chefs in the guild also learned about the correct method of preparing food via telepathy with Shiroe's group, and had been gathering all kinds of ingredients to prepare for the feast.

Maryele said that the chefs had been hard at work mastering Nyanta's method of cooking manually.

Even if it were just trying out the food, the guild members were happy to eat food with taste again, bringing joy that was comparable to Serara's safe return.

The new cooking method was not without issues.

Firstly, beginners needed to spend time to prepare the food by hand. Food had always been easy to prepare using the menu, be it steam or boil, it only took 10 seconds to finish. But the new method required chefs to spend the appropriate amount of time to prepare the food instead.

Also, cooking using the menu required only a maximum of 5 ingredients. But the new methods required the use of all ingredients needed to make the dish. Curry made from meat, potatoes, onions, and spices wouldn't have carrots in it.

They also found out through their research that when chefs attempt to make a difficult dish, there would be a chef level requirement. If they were under leveled, they would fail to make the dish no matter what ingredients they used.

On the whole, it was observed that using fried, grilled, and steamed cooking methods required high chef levels to be successful, but the details remain unconfirmed.

Other than this, there was another issue.

Using the old method, people just needed to gather the necessary ingredients and anyone would be able to cook the same dish via menu selection. The appearance would be similar, but the soggy cracker taste would also be the same.

But for the new method, even if they were the same chef level and used the same ingredients, the quality of the finished products could differ greatly too. No matter how high the chef level was, the food was still prepared manually by the chef. The quality of the food was no longer solely dependent on the chef level, and there were also no limits to what type of food you could make.

Although the new method had many restrictions, it was not worthless. On the contrary, it was a very valuable discovery. Even if the new method took more effort and ingredients, and the taste varied from chef to chef, if one thought about it using the real world's logic, it made perfect sense.

The important thing was that Shiroe's group and the Crescent Moon Alliance were already sick of eating food that was similar to tasteless, mass-produced rations.

"We have grown numb from the animal feed we have been eating. Animal feed is different than a human dish! Only what we are eating now can be considered a proper meal!"

As mentioned by the young sorcerer of the Crescent Moon Alliance, it was only after you had tasted delicious food that you would realize what a pathetic life you have been living.

After finishing up the food preparation and the decor, the guild received Shiroe's group as the guests of honor. A festive atmosphere surrounded the guild hall.

They ushered the guests to the grand dining table in the meeting room. They informed the guests that dinner would be ready in an hour and wine was brought out to the group's enjoyment.

Both the guests and the hosts were enjoying this merry event. For the guild members, such a party with great food and fine company was a first ever since the Catastrophe.

"Today is a day worthy of celebration! Let's eat, drink, and play to our hearts' content!"

To the guild members who had lived everyday in depression since the Catastrophe, Maryele's cheerful announcement gave them courage from the depths of their hearts.

Words of thanks filled the meeting room for a short moment, but Nyanta simply said, "I will go take a look in the kitchen" and left. Serara followed him hurriedly. The two of them entered the temporary kitchen that spanned the whole workshop room and started cooking with the guild's chefs who looked like veterans in a battlefield.

By using the new method, the 'cook book' listed in the menu was no longer relevant, the chef had to rely on their own skills and knowledge from the real world, which would affect the taste.

The chefs and Nyanta displayed their cooking knowledge and shared their recipes, making the feast even more fanciful.

The guild members who were unable to squeeze into the meeting room moved into the other rooms to chat and drink.

The food kept coming.

Fried chicken, eggs with tomatoes, corn salads, seafood baked rice, unfermented bread that looks like Indian naan, spicy mutton soup, heavily seasoned deer meat, cut fruits, pancakes with butter.

Serara walked around the whole guild hall holding a big tray to distribute the dishes, but all the people in the rooms told her the same thing, "This party is held to celebrate your safe return, just sit down and enjoy yourself." But she just replied with a smile, "This is my way of saying thanks for saving me," and continued playing her part as a maid.

This part of Serara was very endearing, and her fans in the guild increased. Everybody wanted to drink with her when Serara visited the room, making her dizzy.

Shiroe's group was also dragged everywhere.

Naotsugu started talking about battles while surrounded by low level players.

Crescent Moon Alliance was a young guild, and just a few members were level 90. And they only reached level 90, but did not go for the content beyond.

"In other words, the important thing is that the level of the teammates match each other. Levels are not important, what is important are the things beyond levels."

"Beyond levels? You mean ultimate moves?"

The young swashbuckler Shouryuu whose face was red from all the drinking asked Naotsugu who was biting into his chicken kebab. Shouryuu was the guild's battle team leader and had raided together with Naotsugu several times. To him, Naotsugu was like a hero.

"Hmmm... That is... Panties!"

Naotsugu's strong announcement stopped everyone in their tracks. The atmosphere in the room was really awkward, even Shouryuu had the expression "What is this guy saying?"

Naotsugu seemed to notice the weird atmosphere, and tried to break his way through and says:

"That was just a joke... eh, what were we talking about? To win battles by leveling, the reason you lose will be your level being too low right? If you reached the level cap, what does that mean? It implies that at the level cap, you can never beat the opponents you lose to since you can't level anymore. That will just be sad and depressing to the extreme! To avoid such situations, we have to research winning tactics as well as work together with our teammates. Without these two aspects, you will lose no matter where you go. It will be too late if you realize this after reaching the level cap. People who have never co-oped with others will not develop good teamwork with others just because they lost. On the other hand, even if your level is low, you can still work on your tactics and teamwork, and will be the strongest formation when you finish your training. The important thing is to ask yourself "What other ways can I contribute?" My bro Shiroe

is a master of this, because he is "Black Heart Glasses", willing to do anything to secure victory!"

The crowd seemed moved by the speech this time.

But if Shiroe heard what he said, he would probably say something like "Don't use me to draw aggro!"

They moved on to chat about tips and tricks in handling different type of enemies, debating all kinds of topics. No matter whether they were good or bad players, everyone in this world loved gaming, and even after they were transported to an alternate world, they would be eager to learn once they recovered their spirit.

On the other hand, Akatsuki was confined in a certain room.

This was one of the Crescent Moon Alliance's rooms that was reserved for ladies only.

The room had a dressing table and scented sachets, giving it a simple, clean, and elegant feel. Five women surrounded Akatsuki.

"Come here, Akatsuki-chan, it is time for you to give in."

"I refuse."

Akatsuki wore her usual grumpy expression on her face. She searched the room for an escape route, but did not find any.

"There is no need to be afraid, we will be gentle."

"You should be aware that is a bad guy's line!"

The leader of the ladies, the beautiful bard with blond curly hair Henrietta, moved nearer with her fingers squirming. Akatsuki took a step back fearfully, but a tall lady hugged her from behind.

"How small and cute!"

"Don't say I am small! I am older than you, probably!"

Crescent Moon Alliance master Maryele.

It was rare for women to be guild masters. This led to the proportion of women in the Crescent Moon Alliance being higher than other guilds'. And

a lot of the guild members, including the lady in charge of all accounting matters Henrietta, were enchanted by cute things.

Akatsuki's small stature and her doll-like face endeared her to many fans within the guild. There were guys who had crushes on her, but the female fans were more passionate and harder to handle.

"Ding ding, we have 3 sets of summer dresses for you!"

"Hold on, who would wear that for battle!"

Henrietta seemed to misunderstand something and carried on presenting the pretty one piece dress with a blushing red face. Akatsuki retorted immediately.

Since they were girls, Akatsuki couldn't use violence like she did with Naotsugu and could only wriggle and struggle. But the girls even praised her for looking so cute struggling, making Akatsuki lose the means and energy to fight back.

Not only that, they also took out a dark purple dress, and the next moment a lacy dress with lotus flower edges. The overly girly dresses made Akatsuki dizzy.

"I am a shinobi serving my lord, how can I wear such frilly clothes?!"

"We got permission from Shiroe-sama. Come here, time for you to give up."

"You set me up! My lord, did you set me up?!"

Akatsuki could only accept her fate in tears as the girls with wild looks in their eyes moved in together.

Part 2

As the party drew to a close, the happy times flew by with the sound of gratitude, well wishes, drinking cheers, and compliments for the food.

Fascinated by the food, enchanted by the drinks, playing their hearts out.

The moon should have set completely.

The guild hall, with some lingering warmth of the party, was shrouded in the bliss-filled, peaceful air unique to the end of a festival.

Beer bottles, ice buckets, and plates were scattered on the tables everywhere, like in the wake of a hurricane.

Guild members were lying everywhere, some under the table, some on the sofa, some curled up on the floor.

Naotsugu snored in a spread eagle position in the meeting room, while Akatsuki who was all dolled up by the "Crescent Moon Alliance Cute Girl Fanclub" leader Henrietta, slept peacefully on a cushion.

"Woah."

Shiroe caught the bottle that was shaking at the edge of a table, and put it into his Bag of Holding along with the other bottles. The bag was able to negate the weight of items it holds, and was very useful for cleaning up.

In the quiet meeting room where everyone was sleeping, only Shiroe and Maryele were awake.

In the corner of the table was a pile of dishes with some leftovers. Maryele cleaned up the room that was messed up in the drunken party, and covered each of the sleeping members with a blanket. She put both hands on her hips and turned to talk to Shiroe.

"Was our reception good?"

"Ah, yeah."

A voice similar to sleep-talking came from somewhere in the room.

Shiroe smiled at Maryele as a reply after hearing her, keeping his voice down in order to not wake the others.

"What should we do? Do you want to sleep too Shiro-bou?"

"I am not sleepy..."

"Is that so."

Maryele approached Shiroe, with an expression as though they had just met after not seeing each other for a long time.

"Let's have tea then. It is not convenient here, let's go to the guild master room."

Maryele left after inviting Shiroe, telling him "Wait a moment". She went to check on all the rooms. The members in all the rooms had eaten their fill and were sleeping on a sofa, cushion, or floor.

"We need to do a major cleanup tomorrow."

"I will help."

"I can't let my guest do that."

Maryele looked at her members with a gentle and kind face. Seeing Maryele as she was now, Shiroe was glad that he took the rescue mission

The two of them cleared the potentially dangerous bottles and plates away, and headed to the guild master room together. Before Shiroe left for Susukino, it was in this frilly room that Shiroe decided to make his move after hearing Maryele's explanation of the situation.

The only thing that matched the feel of an office in this room was the big table. Everywhere else was decorated in pink, as if this were Maryele's bedroom.

"What would you like?"

"Anything is fine."

"Then we will drink something that is already made... let me search."

Maryele brought the leftover beverage "Black Tea" over. This tea was suitable to be drunk either hot or cold, and was really refreshing if one added fruits in.

The two of them sat on the sofa for a moment of rest.

In this type of party, Shiroe was always the last one awake. He did not hate banquets. He actually liked them a lot. But the more happy he was, the more he wanted to protect it and was unable to sleep. Nyanta and company had always made fun of him for this habit. Maryele seemed to feel the same way. Her tender eyes as she covered each member with a blanket was a sight to remember.

The guild hall was filled with the gentle sound of people sleeping soundly or turning around, which was more at ease than total silence.

"You have taken good care of us. I am very grateful."

"Don't mention it, it wasn't a big deal."

Similar to the warmth of the festival, Shiroe replied with a warm and fuzzy feeling. He did not expect this level of gratitude from everyone. To be honest, he expected some level of gratitude, but not from so many of them.

He thought back to the Crescent Moon Alliance members' smiles which were almost as wide as their faces.

Shiroe was different from the extroverted Naotsugu and Nyanta. He had an aura that keeps people at bay, but the Crescent Moon Alliance members still chatted with him and expressed their gratitude despite that.

(I did not expect them to be so happy.)

Shiroe was already prepared to be blamed for his arrogance in butting into the business of others.

Shiroe could not endure the world becoming like 'this', and took up the quest to vent his frustration. This was just Shiroe forcing his principles and values on others.

Shiroe thought that was very arrogant behavior.

(I won't be sorry for this, but understand that this is not something worthy of thanks.)

That's why when others said their words of gratitude, Shiroe panicked and didn't know how to react since he did not understand why.

"If this is not a big deal, what would be a big deal? We have to repay your kindness with gratitude."

"Let's not talk about gratitude... When I was gone, how is the situation here?"

"The situation here..."

Upon hearing Shiroe's question, Maryele's expression became complicated.

Shiroe did not press her. He calmly swirled the tea in his cup as he waited.

"Akiba... is more stable now."

"Stable?"

"Yes, PK has decreased, security... I feel it is not bad. No, I don't mean compared to other places. I think that it is better than the worst case scenario, so it is not too bad."

Maryele picked her words carefully.

"But the atmosphere is very bad. I cannot describe it clearly, in other words... erm, I'm not saying it is bad because someone is doing bad things. It feels like something is broken, even if you want to do something, you will be unable to do so. I am sure this is because the tier has been set."

Tier.

This phrase gives an inauspicious feeling.

"We are a mid-sized guild with about 30 members right? We have only four level 90s, half our members are below level 50, this is not something we can control. But this is a fact that cannot be changed. For example 'D.D.D' is the biggest battle guild in Akiba, with more than 1500 members, lots of level 90s. This is also a fact that cannot be changed."

Maryele placed her glass on the table. She adjusted her posture, the tips of the fingers on her left hand touching those on her right.

"I'm not saying this is a bad thing. I understand that big guilds have their problems too. But if the situation continues to deteriorate, we will be going down the path of no return... Big scaled guilds with big facilities, of course they will do well. But this will create an atmosphere and rules in the city, for example preferential treatment in the market."

"Things like this..."

"Things like this are not written rules. But they have so many people, and the people who can throw their weight around on the streets all belongs to the big guilds. The guilds are powerful in all aspects, so their members can act arrogantly, which makes sense to me."

Absurd.

Big guilds had more people, so they were more efficient in all areas. For example, a battle guild's main income source was from item drops after defeating monsters. Fights against monsters in order to secure item drops were known as raids. The number of people available was tied closely to the efficiency of the raids. If a guild wanted to maximize the use of the item drops, having members with production subclasses in the guild would help to bring out the potential in each item, and was more efficient. But this did not mean that every member of the guild was strong or great.

If it was *<her>*, she would probably laugh it off.

She would just laugh heartily at the pathetic players who crowded together, saying that they were not cool at all.

"Didn't I just mention PK has dropped? This is the same logic. By comparing guilds, one will be stronger than the other. If a guild is stronger than another, their tier will be clear, and there will be no point in fighting it out since the lower tier guild knows they will lose. In order to avoid conflict, they will not contest with that guild for the rights of the raiding ground, and move to other grounds. But the other grounds are either very far away or have bad item drops. Even though PK has decreased, this is only because the big guilds have already divvied up the raiding grounds. You cannot fight in the city, so there are no conflicts. But even so, invisible territorial lines are forming, and this is what I meant by tier."

Shiroe was not drunk, but he still felt his mind become clearer. This was a more annoying situation than the deterioration of security. This situation was indeed not the worst case, since there was less conflict and PK.

(But, I feel that... it is irritating and annoying.)

Shiroe thought that this was not cool at all.

The feeling of irritation became a vortex that kept spinning.

Maryele said that it was not bad because someone did bad things. For example, hogging a raiding ground was nothing honorable, but you couldn't really say it was a bad thing. There were no laws in this world, so you couldn't say anyone was guilty.

A method to maintain efficiency in raids was to camp in a specific area and accumulate the experience and knowledge of the zone in order to operate

efficiently. Becoming an expert on the tactics of a specific zone was not anything wrong.

And the big guilds needed to spend a lot of resources to keep up this tactic, and even needed to send out patrols to protect these areas.

Shiroe would not criticize this strategy without reason.

If you allowed the weak to criticize these methods, it will lead to the weak discriminating against the strong.

Shiroe could understand Maryele's view of "no one is at fault." In actual fact, this was just "going with the flow."

Despite that, Shiroe was still unable to accept the situation.

In this alternate world without laws, could a man of merit obtain a higher position? If it was possible to give an uncool answer, it would be "no." But Shiroe understood the reason he answered "no" stemmed from Shiroe's own preferences.

"Did the small guilds do anything to change the situation?

"Err... Yes. For example a few small guilds suggested setting up an alliance to solve the problem of raiding grounds. But it didn't go too well... Since all of us are small guilds, our member sizes are not the same. There will be disagreements when going over the details, which leads to discontent. Or people unable to suppress their willful opinions. In the end the alliance broke after a quarrel and a number of the guilds decided to end it, and get absorbed by a large guild."

So there was such a thing, Shiroe thought.

In a way, this couldn't be helped. While it was the same as securing raiding grounds, good raiding ground vary for each level. Hence the grounds preferred by each group differed according to the level and number of members of each guild.

If you wanted to work together to secure a raiding ground, you would need to keep your selfish desires in check and work together selflessly. Big guilds might have enough control over their members, but for small guilds, conflicts were unavoidable and it was hard to come to a consensus.

If you thought about it, the transport gate being down and the problem with fairy rings had a big impact. Japan servers had to control tens of thousands of zones. The number of guilds were about one thousand, so the problem of not enough raiding grounds was hard to imagine.

But with the transport gate down and the unknown nature of the fairy ring transport schedule, the movement range of Adventurers was very limited. Players with griffons like Shiroe were exceptions, so most of them were confined to walking or traveling by horse. Raiding grounds that were one day's distance away from the city were much more limited compared to the past.

For Akiba, there were roughly 50 zones in the region, with about 300 raiding grounds. If you considered the level, distance from town, and safety, it was easy to tell that the most popular spots would be heavily contested.

After the Catastrophe, all zones were available for purchase. The prices were determined by factors Adventurers did not understand. But there was a factor that was apparent, which was its size. All zones that were big enough to be used for raiding were incredibly expensive. But for guilds that had enough manpower, there was no need to purchase the area, they just needed people to just camp there.

"Another thing, the Black Sword Knights and Silver Sword guilds are attempting to break 91."

"Ah?"

91, that should be referring to level. With the 'Novasphere Pioneers' expansion, the level cap must have been increased, so this was not surprising. Since the level cap had been raised, you would be able to develop beyond the old level limit of 90.

But didn't you have to defeat monsters level 85 and above? Since the game world had become our new reality, Shiroe wondered if there was a need to risk such a dangerous battle.

"Big guilds are already strong now, but it is impossible for the number of players to increase correct? So it is not just players, the number of high level players will also affect the influence of the guilds. Consider this, Black Sword Knights are elitist..."

Shiroe nodded and agrees with Maryele's point.

Black Sword Knights were an arrogant force in Akiba. With their elite-only policy, there were no members that were lower than level 85. The guild only allows members over the level of 85 to join anyway. Black Sword Knights was a pure-blooded battle guild.

"Black Sword Knights is still upholding its joining requirement. Black Sword Knights is a famous guild, our Crescent Moon Alliance cannot even compare to them, right? But compared to the 1500 members of D.D.D., they pale in comparison, since they have absorbed quite a number of small guilds. As for the Black Sword Knights, they are unable to absorb guilds due to their entry restriction, so they are aiming to go beyond level 90, focusing on quality over quantity to win."

"But how are they going to..."

This was the core of Shiroe's doubt. He understood the motives and also the considerations and tactics, but was there a way to succeed? "By using 'EXP Pot'."

"... EXP Pot."

In Elder Tales, this was a famous support item. By drinking this potion, you could slightly increase your attack and recovery powers, and receive twice the EXP in battles.

There was another effect. In a normal case, you need to defeat monsters that are less than 5 levels below you. But with the potion, you can gain EXP even if you defeat monsters 7 levels below you.

The effects of the potion last for only 2 hours, but it would help you earn EXP during its effective time.

This type of potion might be powerful, but there was no need to complete major raids or quests to obtain it, so almost all players had used it before.

As a game withstanding the long test of time, Elder Tales had been increasing its level cap over the years. This resulted in a trend where people who joined later needed a longer time to catch up to those who joined earlier. To counter this issue, the developer provided all kinds of aid to help them level faster. This potion was one of the measures.

To put it simply, players below level 30 would receive a free potion every day. This was a kind service by the developers hoping the players will "reach mid-level faster and enjoy the game".

"But those potions..."

"There is a guild known as Hamelin. This guild announced that they want to save the beginners, and recruited many of them after the Catastrophe. It was a period of confusion, and the masses did not have any time to help the beginners, including us. But Hamelin sells the 'EXP Pot' for money and makes a killing. The big guilds use the 'EXP Pot' to level up. No one knows who is at fault, or if there is any bad guy. This is how the situation is changing, and no one can stop it..."

Part 3

The warmth of the party was completely gone.

Even though it was early summer, the wind at night was still icy cold. His cloak fluttered in the strong wind.

The shadow of the cloud flashed across the floor.

The moon was overly bright, able to cast shadows late at night. Shiroe seemed to be chasing the contrast between the shadow and the moonlight, as he walked in Akiba at midnight.

He didn't have any place he wanted to go.

He just wanted to get away from this unknown dark feeling, or he wanted to confirm this emotion. Shiroe was not sure what he really thought.

He felt that there was a heavy thing in his chest, similar to how the sea at night provided no sense of ease. It felt like asphalt, dense and dark and incomprehensible, an unidentified object. Even though it had a big volume, there was nowhere to vent it, it simply existed there.

(It simply exists, but...)

Shiroe understood.

This emotion that he had nowhere to vent.

Evildoers exist, Hamelin did not have good guys, and given the chance, Shiroe would fight them just like he did with Brigandia.

But even if Hamelin was evil, they were just a small part of the evil. The current situation in Akiba was not the fault of Hamelin, it was due to all sort of events that "could not be helped". The current Akiba was the result of these events accumulating. The depressing atmosphere of Akiba frustrated Shiroe and he had nowhere to vent it.

Shiroe understood that if he vented this emotion on Hamelin, he was just throwing a tantrum.

He held his breath and kept walking.

Throwing a tantrum was ugly.

Shiroe was unwilling to vent his frustration just to make himself feel better.

Shiroe was unable to shake this dark emotion. In Shiroe's mind, venting out at Hamelin was even uglier than what Hamelin is doing.

(But, if it is like this...)

If it was like this, Shiroe wouldn't have any place to vent his frustration.

Hamelin was the small-time evil, so it was still okay.

But, who was the greater evil?

Big battle guilds might notice the source of "EXP Pot", but they pretended not to see in order to expand their influence, were they wrong?

Even though the beginners know they are being oppressed, but they were willing to accept that they were weak and hope to gain protection by submitting themselves, were they wrong?

Small guilds understood the inequality between guilds, and wished to break the stalemate by forming an alliance. But in order to protect their own interests, they turned to infighting, playing politics. Were they wrong?

All the players understood the atmosphere in the city was worsening but they chose to not do anything about it, and not take responsibility. Were they wrong?

It was wrong.

All of them were evil.

But they were small evils, only to the extent of foolishness and selfishness. None of them were the hidden evil mastermind, similar to the evil of fairy tales. You could not solve the problem by defeating an enemy, it was not that simple.

The twisted nature of everything led to the feeling of frustration.

Shiroe himself was inside this twisted world, feeling more and more out of breath. As the lopsided rules started to take shape in Akiba, even if Shiroe's level and equipment was better than most players', he still could not do anything. Even if he understood the situation, he would choose to ignore it, and carry on like that.

This fact frustrated Shiroe. This was no different from an apathetic citizen. And someone he knew was caught up in the trouble, which made it even worse.

Even though Maryele failed, she still pushed the development of the alliance to this stage. But Shiroe had not reached this stage yet.

And that the Shiroe who didn't reach that stage thought that "small guilds who can fight among themselves are at fault", it was so embarrassing that he nearly drew blood biting his lips.

(I am just as bad... Maybe I am the worst of them all.)

Shiroe did not know when he came to the bridge. This old western style bridge covered in moss stood above the river. He leaned against the railings, the moist air and trembling voice dissipating in the reflection of the moon.

Then, what needed to be done?

Shiroe unconsciously pushed this feeling and thought about it. Whenever he saw a problem, he could not help thinking about it as it was his nature. This was also how he molded his sense of responsibility in the Debauchery Tea Party.

Many concepts were created and discarded.

Shiroe's right hand was the red poker cards, his left was the black poker cards. They dueled using the lance of negative and the sword affirmative,

each clash producing the sound of logic, eliminating unnecessary facts, going through all possibilities, the deduction and inference flowing along with the river in the night.

He was unable to come up with an answer. It was impossible to come up with an answer. Shiroe knew that a perfect answer did not exist. And he was carrying too big a burden from the start, and he was carrying it on his own free will.

(Thinking that it is a burden is an arrogant thought, this is just the debt I owe... I am just running away, I became a solo player on my own free will.)

Shiroe was not sure what <she> would say. Shiroe moved his gaze from the river to the moon. The clear and bright moon illuminated Akiba in the night.

(She was a forthright person... Not like me, weak and indecisive.)

Shiroe thought that <she> would definitely laugh heartily and solve the issue like a hurricane, or just abandon Akiba if it were too troublesome.

Speaking practically, she would do whatever she wanted and say to Shiroe after the fact "Shiroe will think of how to deal with this mess! You are willing to, right? Any objections? I don't think so! Shiroe is talented, you will be able to deal with this easily!" and leave the assignment to Shiroe.

Shiroe opened the Telepathy contact menu.

There were two names on his friend list.

Tohya, Minori.

The twins who should have joined Hamelin.

He could find out just by asking. The twins who got separated with Shirou might have been caught up in the middle of the storm, all because Shiroe left them alone. Because Shiroe prioritized meeting Naotsugu after the Catastrophe.

Shiroe wanted to help them, wanted to do something for them. But this was different than saving Serara of the Crescent Moon Alliance.

The first difference was that Maryele was in a guild. Shiroe went on behalf of Maryele. In other words, he was just doing a job with Maryele being the client.

Of course Shiroe wanted to rescue Serara, but Shiroe had an escapist mentality, thinking this was just a job request that he had to fulfill.

The second difference was that even though Shiroe wanted to save the twins, he wanted to settle the current situation more. When he escaped from Susukino he had a thought. There must be players in the same boat as Serara in Susukino. Even if there were not many, abandoning them and only rescuing Serara would still weigh down on his conscience.

But Shiroe could still use 'the current mission is rescuing Serara' as an excuse, ignore the fact, and return to Akiba

Shiroe felt that if he ran from the facts this time, he wouldn't be able to fight anymore.

So he would need to save the twins, stop the big guilds from their bullying style, improve the city's atmosphere and build a new order. A tall order for a big guild, and even harder to achieve for Shiroe who was not even in any guild. Could Shiroe do it? To be honest, it was impossible.

(Not even in a guild...)

These words brings Shiroe a dull but manageable pain.

Thinking carefully, Shiroe thought of a guild as an organization you belonged to and could control you easily. Guilds have always existed, but had nothing to do with Shiroe. He was just judging the guilds' merits and its suitability for himself from an outside point of view.

This was not an irresponsible attitude.

That was how Shiroe thought about it.

This was no different than those living in Akiba, but discussing the atmosphere of Akiba from the outside point of view.

Shiroe had not joined a guild or worked for a guild, but was forcing his own preference and convenience on the guilds... that was indeed an arrogant way of thinking.

"Guild..."

"Does Shiroe-chi still hate guilds nya?"

With the sound of pieces of asphalt debris falling, Nyanta appeared from the shadow of the buildings. Nyanta squinted his kind and slim eyes as he approached Shiroe who was talking to himself.

"!"

Shiroe was surprised, but he still shrugged and made space for Nyanta.

"No, that's not true... probably."

Shiroe thought the reason he hated guilds was because of an unlucky encounter. But hanging out with the Crescent Moon Alliance in the post-Catastrophe world began to melt his stubborn view away.

He could understand he acted arrogantly now.

On the other hand, Shiroe recalled being attacked by PKers in the zone around Akiba, and the group similar to bandits in Susukino. Guilds could easily be corrupted. Big guilds that fought for territory constantly would erode their ethics over time, which was easy to imagine.

"...Eh, this is indeed an area of concern nya."

Nyanta replied

"But, things that cannot be corrupt cannot be trusted nya. Birth, death, sickness, and aging are the natural laws of the world nya, things that are made will decay, will become ill, will age, and finally accept death nya. But if you deny all these, you will also be denying birth nya. Shiroe-chi must understand this nya. For instance 'there' might be very comfortable to be, but it is only when everyone wants to be comfortable, then it will become a comfortable place nya. The treasure you reap without sowing is not real treasure nya."

Yes, that was true, you were right.

Everybody had been putting in this kind of effort so naturally that they were not even aware of it. But Shiroe understood how precious that was. He also understood his cat friend had also put in a lot of effort.

The effort put in by Maryele was the same.

Maryele's smile was one of the supporting pillars of the Crescent Moon Alliance. Guilds that distributed money and rare items definitely didn't have bonds as strong as the Crescent Moon Alliance.

By this theory, the Akiba of the past was also comfortable due to the efforts of others.

"Chief, what should I do..."

Shiroe's word made Nyanta look towards the moon.

His black ears fluttering in the wind stopped.

"Just do the greatest thing nya"

"Greatest..."

Shiroe looked at Nyanta, who had the usual kind expression that looked even more mature in the moon light.

"Shiroe-chi is being too polite nya."

Naotsugu seemed to have said the same thing too.

Shiroe searched for the meaning behind these words.

If it were not a joke made at the spur of the moment, Shiroe would seriously think about the essence of it.

The meaning behind it.

What I had been doing to Naotsugu.

What I had been doing to Akatsuki.

In other words, the two of them already understood.

"I made them wait 'til now?"

"That's right nya."

"They have been waiting for me 'til now?"

"That's right nya."

"They didn't go anyway, they have always been by my side."

"That's right nya."

(They are waiting for my invitation to form a guild)

Shiroe lowered his head, the darkness in his heart rumbled. His emotion was compressed under the lid, and would overflow at anytime.

The sound of the crickets, the silent river flow, the white moon. Shiroe stood still and clenched his fist to hold his emotions in.

They had great expectations.

They were optimistic.

They were waiting

Shiroe had been analyzing and worrying about all sorts of things, but he did not even comprehend it until now. Maybe it was because his blood circulation was poor, but his self-doubt and inferiority complex might be deeply rooted, but this joy, compassion, and trust washed away the chains.

"Is there still time?"

"Of course nya."

"Chief Nyanta, please join me too... If Chief is willing to accompany me, I will be very happy. Without Chief around, I would be troubled."

Shiroe looked at Nyanta seriously as he spoke. Nyanta smiled sheepishly and said "I want a comfortable porch."

"We will work hard together to prepare a stylish porch."

Shiroe nodded.

If you wanted to do the "greatest thing". If you had the permission to hold great expectations. Even if it came with a burden too heavy to bear alone. Shiroe thought of a plan.

If his companions were willing to share the burden.

Part 4

It was humid in the dark room.

The floor was made from ancient concrete material that could absorb heat without limits. Because of that, it was as cool as grave soil even in the summer.

Minori wrapped her dirty dark red cloak tightly around her; she lost track of the number of times she tossed and turned.

The night seemed to last forever.

Her exhausted body craved for rest. But she was not sure whether it was the hard cold bedding or her worries for the unknown tomorrow that was making her lose sleep. Minori slept lightly, and woke at the slightest sound.

As she regained awareness in the darkness, the first thing she felt was a pain similar to being crushed. Her mind was still hazy from the dream, the remnant feelings of panic and regret fading slowly into the darkness.

The majority of the day was spent working in a cramped room as a 'tailor', her hands hurt like they were deadwood. Today, the pain did not go away even as she caressed her fingertips repeatedly.

Her brother slept hugging his knees.

There were about 20 of them sleeping in this room.

Guild Hamelin.

A mid-sized guild claiming to have the policy of "Mutual assistance for beginners".

The guild the twins joined.

After the Catastrophe, the city had an air of stagnation and confusion. The sudden event shocked the populace into inactivity. There were no conflicts of significance in the first few days. In Minori's opinion, the reason laid with the people who were unable to handle the truth, hoping that it was some sort of elaborate joke.

The twins were just like that.

They didn't know what happened the first few hours.

For the next few days, even though they knew what happened, they didn't understand why.

Even now there was no answer as to why the Catastrophe happened. But as she lost herself in the question "How did it turn into this", she lost the precious 'first few days' that could not be recovered.

The memories of the few days after were lost in the fog of her memory.

Minori remembered that she was starving, not knowing the food mechanics of the world. She shared the food bought from the market with her brother, was attacked when they left the city, and was stripped of her belongings before she understood the situation.

Shiroe instructed her to keep all items that she couldn't use at the moment in the storage bank. Minori only recalled the lesson after everything was gone.

Most of the players contacted their friends and gathered information.

But they were beginners with no one to trust. They had someone in mind, but didn't have the nerve to contact him.

They might have had the courage to do so right after the Catastrophe, but after losing everything they were a heavy burden in the world.

Minori considered her sibling relationship with Tohya to be the best.

She heard that brothers and sisters grew apart when they enter middle school. Her classmate said the independence and obsession with cleanliness would make siblings of the opposite sex repulse each other, seeing them as an annoyance.

Contrary to this, the twins maintained their wonderful relationship.

Minori had never thought of arguing with Tohya, and always wanted to help him.

There was a reason for this.

Tohya was unable to walk because of a childhood accident. His legs themselves were fine, but his nerves seemed to be damaged.

Minori had never held back from quarreling with Tohya out of pity. This was an unfortunate accident, Minori still wished to suffer the pain in his place, but she could not change the facts.

In Minori's eyes, Tohya was a cheerful and hardworking person. Even after the accident, he did not throw frustration and anger around him. It was hard to live with a handicapped family, so Tohya had always cheered himself on to reduce the emotional burden on his parents.

Minori remembered that Tohya was always chatting about random topics in his fortnightly trip to and from the hospital. Tohya was like a typical middle school boy, discussing manga or the internet. The doctor said that the checkups were painful, but Tohya never showed any signs of suffering.

Minori sometimes thought that Tohya's actions were his way of expressing concern.

Minori perceived Tohya as a "dependable brother". In her eyes he was childish and always getting carried away, so it was not wrong to think of him as an idiot who did not think of the consequences.

But Tohya had a trustworthy nature. Even though he couldn't walk, and would face many challenge in the future, Tohya would probably travel his own path.

Even though she was older by just a few hours, Minori still wanted to do her part as the elder sister as Tohya's guardian. She wanted to be prepared if Tohya ever needed help.

This bond that was similar to respect among siblings, especially young siblings, was the key to the relationship between the twins.

They started playing Elder Tales because of this.

Tohya was exhausted after going through countless checkups and did not leave the house. He developed an interest for Online RPGs because of this. Having gotten bored of all other indoor games, they pleaded with their parents for permission to play online, with the promise that it wouldn't affect their school grades.

This was a world where Tohya could run freely without being concerned about other people. Tohya enjoyed the game while Minori was excited with the new experience.

And so the twins fell in love with Elder Tales after playing it once.

Because of her experience, Minori understood this was something that 'cannot be helped'.

Sometimes, it was cruel to be a child.

It meant that you could not realize your dreams through effort.

Minori was also a child; she was just as troublesome as the handicapped Tohya. A child was sometimes as heavy a burden as a handicapped person.

For example, Minori could not drive Tohya to the hospital, which was normal since she was still in middle school. This was also expected, and would be a burden on their parents.

With no abilities, unable to take care of themselves, no one was willing to help, and their dreams were never coming true... These were factors that would annoy those you like, or make one a bother.

In this world, being low level was similar to being guilty, as it means that you were a burden.

After the Catastrophe, Minori spotted Shiroe from afar once.

The instant Minori saw the tall bespectacled figure, she knew that was Shiroe.

But she did not call out to him.

Standing beside Shiroe who had blood and dust on him was a warrior in armor who looked like a veteran, and a young girl as beautiful as a night elf.

Shiroe had his own battles to fight.

Minori lost her courage to approach Shiroe when she thought of that. In this chaotic world, everyone had their hands full trying to survive and would not have the strength to help. How could she tell if an acquaintance who she only met a few times would be willing to help her?

Minori closed her eyes and opened the menu.

Her friend list was very short, with only the names of her brother, a few beginners she knew from Hamelin, and Shiroe. Minori used the cursor in her mind to gently touch Shiroe's glowing name.

To Minori who had lost everything, this was a treasure no one can take from her.

(I should have asked Shiroe-san to teach me even more things...)

Minori thought as she wrapped her cloak around her cold body. The night seemed longer than usual, the dull pain in her chest was keeping her awake.

Suddenly, she heard a soft ringing sound in her ear.

She inhaled sharply, making a noise louder than she expected, surprising her.

The name she was caressing in her mind was now shaking.

Minori checked to see if she had activated the telepathy function by accident, which had no sign of use. This was a call from Shiroe, and at this time right before dawn.

The ringing started again.

Minori knew from experience that only she would hear the sound. But if she made any noise, it might alert the Hamelin members or disturb her roommates' sleep.

Even so, Minori could not ignore the ringing sound.

She operated the menu and said "Yes" in a barely audible voice.

"Eh... Good evening, can you hear me? This is Shiroe."

"!"

This was not only a familiar and nostalgic voice. It was also a bridge to the happy times of the past which filled Minori's heart.

In the dark and humid bedding, covered by a dirty cloak, Minori sobbed softly.

"... you are Minori right?"

Unable to suppress her emotions, her tears flowed out from the depths of her nasal ducts. Shiroe spoke again. Minori was unable to answer, as making a sound might arouse the suspicion of others. And she was unwilling to let Shiroe hear as she lost control of her emotions.

Minori nodded in her heart repeatedly, but she could only utter in a barely audible voice "Yes".

"..."

"..."

The sound of breathing passed between them. Minori used all her might to control her nose from making any sound. She was so nervous that she could see stars in her eyes. Why now? Why look for me? These questions circled her head.

"Minori, listen to me. Cough once for yes, twice for no. If I said something wrong or you want to express something cough three times... Is that OK?"

Shiroe's question made Minori understand with a shock.

(He knows, Shiroe-san knows everything.)

Shiroe knew Minori's situation, he knew what kind of place Hamelin was.

Minori felt that her mind that had been numbed by the repetitive force of labor was slowly recovering.

(Shiroe-san is the one person I don't want to trouble...)

Ever since she joined Hamelin, Minori understood that even for players 10 levels higher than Tohya, as long as you were a beginner in Elder Tales, you would lack knowledge regarding this alternate world.



Knowledge was the strongest weapon in this world. The lack of knowledge kept beginners from progressing out of this phase. The knowledge she learned from Shiroe became the strength helping them to carry on. Even in a tough environment like Hamelin, they received better treatment compared to other beginners, all thanks to the knowledge Shiroe shared.

Minori had always regarded Shiroe as her benefactor.

She also wished that he became more than her benefactor.

"If you understand, cough once."

Minori gathered the sparse warmth in her body and just managed to moisten her throat.

She made a tiny coughing sound.

Her throat was dryer than she imagined, Minori felt embarrassed by the sound she made.

I owe Shiroe a lot, I must repay him, Minori thought as she swallowed her saliva and listen attentively.

"Minori and Tohya are in Hamelin?"

A cough.

"You have been giving your 'EXP Potion' to Hamelin."

Another cough.

"...Are you okay?"

"..."

In the room so dark you could not even see your hand, the silence was so heavy that you could almost touch it physically.

With this line of questions, Minori understood what Shiroe wanted to ask, and that he wanted to do something for her.

But it was painful because she knew. Minori didn't know how Shiroe was going to deal with this event. But the issue was not the method. The issue was that Shiroe was determined to rescue Minori and Tohya.

What sacrifice would Shiroe need to make to save us? In this alternate world where you need to fight to survive, the two of us would be a burden. What would Shiroe need to give up for our sake?

What was our worth?

If that was the question, there was only one answer.

(We are okay, there is absolutely no problem... we get to eat everyday, my tailor level is rising slowly. Tohya and I can still live here, that's what Tohya would say. That is why... it is okay.)

The voice in her heart seemed to be telling her this from the view of a bystander. As if she was closing the door of hope, Minori coughed once.

...Which meant we were fine.

"Is that true?"

Shiroe asked again with a gentle tone, reminding Minori of her days playing together with him.

Tohya attacked monsters suddenly, Minori would rush over to support, but her presumptuous action attracted more enemy reinforcements.

Shiroe used his sleep spells to incapacitate the reinforcements, Tohya fought with all his might, and Minori healed everyone as much as she could. But there were too many foes, their HP was always in the red danger zone, healing until MP runs out. There were several times when Minori thought "This is it, they are wiping us out", but the three of them still survived.

Minori heard that 90 was the highest level in Elder Tales.

EXP would be deducted as a punishment for death, but Shiroe accompanied the both of us who were about level 10 always at the verge of death. Minori felt guilty and embarrassed about this fact and apologized repeatedly, knocking Tohya's head and forcing him to apologize too.

We could not let Shiroe lose EXP because of us. Even so, Shiroe gave a smile like a child.

I am enjoying myself, this is an adventure after all. Some techniques can only be learned by going through danger... I feel that Minori is slightly too polite, are you having fun? I had a great time.

Minori felt her soul was saved by this gentle voice. It was the same kindness as before, which could not be seen.

That was why Minori coughed only once.

...Which meant I was fine.

This way, I would be able to talk to him with a smile the next time I see him. It would take some time, her appearance was messy like a wandering child. She did not shower, and didn't dare to call herself a girl.

There was a dull pain in her heart, but it was definitely better than bothering Shiroe, Minori convinced herself with a reason which she thought was absurd.

"...I understand, you are fine, let's go out and play some day. I want to play with the two of you, because it is fun. That's why... wait for me a while more."

"...!"

Didn't this mean he did not understand at all?

No, maybe he said this because he understood everything.

Minori's conflicting thoughts clashed in her heart; the tears overflowed from the depths of her eyes; why would Shiroe say something so reckless? Why did he say something so gentle?

Shiroe not accepting her concern caused frustration, guilt, confusion. Troubling Shiroe caused the feelings of guilt and sadness, as well as positive emotions of joy, kindness, bliss and hope.

...And trust in Shiroe.

Two different emotions intertwined, tumbling like the inside of a washing machine. She needed to say something, but does not know what to say.

This was her last chance to stop Shiroe.

Minori coughed. How many times should she cough? Once if she wanted his help? Or twice to reject his offer? Minori let her tears flow freely, then coughed once, then twice more.

"What happened? What do you want to say?"

(... I coughed three times. No, I didn't want to say anything Shiroe-san... Shiroe-san is not our parent, Shiroe-san is a nice person, but we do not have the right to rely on you. That's why you do not need to shoulder burdens such as ourselves.)

But she did not say these words.

In Hamelin's guild hall, in this quiet and moldy room, Minori suppressed the sound of her breathing to the point of almost suffocating.

"As I said, if you want to say anything just cough three times. I understand. I will think of a way to hear what you want to say. For me, I have already decided to do all I can. As I said when we were with Tohya, 'Vanguards who do not trust their support will die as a punishment, supports who don't trust the vanguard will join straight after.' So I believe Minori's 'I am okay', Minori must also believe that I will be coming to save the both of you."

The conversation ended without a soft disconnecting sound.

Minori curled up like a ball, like she was hugging herself.

Shiroe, who did not accept her willful actions made Minori's tears flow endlessly. As if a storm was brewing deep in her ears, she was unable to affirm herself.

But something warm and concrete that did not exist an hour ago grew in her heart.

Part 5

Everyone was present when Henrietta opened the door.

Two days had passed since the lively party that took a whole day to clean up. The Crescent Moon Alliance's atmosphere had returned to its calm state.

"Did something happen? This is a sudden invitation."

"Please have a seat, Henrietta."

Guild master Maryele said.

The leftover food and bottles were scattered around the Crescent Moon Alliance meeting room yesterday, but now the room was totally clean, giving it a refreshing air.

4 people sat around the edge of the big table.

For the Crescent Moon Alliance, guild master Maryele, the one in charge of accounts, Henrietta, and the battle and farming leader, Shouryuu. The three of them were the ones leading the guild.

On the other side was Shiroe.

(Oh... Shiroe-sama.)

"Shiroe-san has something to say to us."

The younger Shouryuu said after checking with Shiroe.

"But we have not heard anything yet."

Maryele said, but Shiroe had a tense expression. Shiroe had sharp eyes, and had the habit of staring. But he seemed more quiet and bold today. His imposing aura was overpowering, and his round glasses did nothing to soften his eyes.

(Erm...)

The way Shiroe was right now was etched clearly into Henrietta's memory.

The normal Shiroe was a dependable young man, but he was different from before.

"Thank you everyone for taking care of me. Today I invited you here... First of all, I want to thank Mary-nee and everyone in the Crescent Moon Alliance."

Maryele waved her hands in front of her in reply to Shiroe.

"Don't mention it! It is nothing really!"

Shouryuu also waved his hand softly to show Shiroe that he need not be concerned about this. The food was delicious, and they didn't spend much money. The important thing was that the guild also had a good time, since the party was also for them to enjoy. The guild was also discussing about thanking Shiroe's group properly in the future.

"No no no, it is okay, because I have thoroughly enjoyed Akatsuki-chan too."

Henrietta recalled Akatsuki's cute reaction with a dreamy smile. As for the subject who was weeping during the incident, let us ignore that for now.

(Ara ara, this is.... Hmm.)

Henrietta observed Shiroe with her frame-less glasses that were designed for women.

This request surprised her.

From Henrietta's observations, Shiroe was a powerful player with a strong sense of morals and would not hesitate helping a friend in need. Even though she did not wish to acknowledge this, Serara's rescue mission was an example of this.

Shiroe's group completed the quest perfectly in place of the Crescent Moon Alliance using methods that were tens of magnitudes better than Henrietta. If Shiroe felt that he could help and was confident of success, he would provide aid without reservation.

But what about the reverse?

From what Henrietta saw, Shiroe handled things logically and reasonably and had a habit of introspecting... He was an awkward young man in some ways and, compared to helping people, he was not good at asking for aid.

But the Shiroe she knew was saying "Everyone, please lend me your strength."

(What kind of request will it be?)

Even though Shiroe was bad at requesting aid, Henrietta had no intention of using this chance to wipe the slate clean in regard to her guild's debt to Shiroe. Of course, Maryele wouldn't do that either. Honestly, when Shiroe asked "everyone please lend me your strength", Henrietta was surprised.

"Shiroe-san, please tell us what you need!"

"That's right Shiroe-sama, the Crescent Moon Alliance is indebted to you anyway."

Henrietta followed Shouryuu's lead to express their willingness to help. In this situation, this was how the guild should treat its benefactor.

But Henrietta was also concerned with Maryele. Since Henrietta entered the room, Maryele maintained a tense expression on her face.

Maryele didn't only show her kindness on the surface, there was no falsehood about the compassion in her heart as well. This was what Henrietta believed. The two of them had been BFFs for the longest time, she knew very well that there was no way that she disliked Shiroe.

So why was Maryele wearing such a heavy expression?

(Does Mary know what Shiroe-sama wants?)

Shiroe did not smile when he heard the words from Henrietta and Shouryuu. He adjusted his glasses with his index finger and said:

"Two kids I know are currently... is confined the right term? Anyway, they joined a certain guild, and I want to rescue them."

Shouryuu acknowledged Shiroe's words by nodding.

"So that's what it is, all we need to do is help them leave that guild, correct? Do you need us to draw the members away, giving them the chance to perform the process of leaving a guild? This is a simple task...Ah, is it another issue? To help them after escaping? Do you need the Crescent Moon Alliance to take care of them?"

Shouryuu said cheerfully.

But Maryele's expression tensed even more.

(... It is not something like this. With Shiroe-sama's talent, if it is just rescuing the two of them, he can manage without our help. What is Shiroe-sama's true intention behind this meeting?)

"This evil guild gathers beginners and confiscates their 'EXP Pot', which is probably sold for money, I don't think that this can be tolerated... that is what I feel now. Between either liking or disliking, I dislike this way of doing things."

Shiroe said with a gentle tone. Hearing this, Shouryuu stopped moving.

He was starting to comprehend what Shiroe wanted.

"The guild you mentioned, is it Hamelin? That is a...rather nasty guild, not a good place. But they have the support of the big guilds..."

Henrietta brought up an obvious query. The subject was Hamelin, but the Black Sword Knights and the Silver Swords were their customers. Those two guilds were in the top 5 battle guilds of Akiba.

"Yes, I want this guild to disappear."

Shiroe said directly.

A deep silence fell in the meeting room.

Maryele sighed softly.

(Mary was expecting something like this...)

Henrietta understood why she was so tense.

"You.. you say disappear, that is... you want to destroy the guild? Is that true? Is there a way to make a guild disappear? If we defeat them by PK, that may bruise their ego a bit, but to destroy the guild itself is a bit..."

Shouryuu stammered.

Henrietta had the same doubts.

There were two ways to dissolve a guild. The guild master could request to close the guild, or all the members could leave the guild. This was the system setting.

You could kill players by PK, but this world inherited the rules of Elder Tales. With the automatic respawn system, death was not a way to stop someone. Even if it affected the morale and cash flow of the members, you could not dissolve the guild this way.

When Shouryuu mentioned "Is there a way to make a guild disappear?", that was a valid point, it was impossible by following common sense.

For big guilds, it might be possible to lure in members of smaller guilds, using their plentiful resources, pushing them to the brink of collapse. Henrietta heard that this happened in Akiba before.

But even through bribes and investing resources, there was no guarantee that the guild would be destroyed. Assuming that this tactic was used on the Crescent Moon Alliance, even if all the members were poached away, as long as Maryele continued to resist by herself, the guild would remain in the system.

Destroying a guild was a difficult task to accomplish. It was not something that can be done easily. If it was that easy, Akiba would not be like this now.

And the words "Destroy their guild and make them disappear" were only something you hear as a insult in quarrels. It was more like a threat, and no one had actually followed up on it before.

Shouryuu interpreted Shiroe's words as an abstract goal, something similar to the declaration "I will defeat you!"

"No, it is exactly as I said, I want this guild to disappear from Akiba."

Shiroe cleared all doubts from Shouryuu's mind.

Shiroe's emotionless and stable voice could give chills to anyone hearing it. Henrietta snuck a peek at Shiroe's expression. If she could detect anger, frustration, or determination, Henrietta would not be so convinced.

But Shiroe's face had a hint of a smile. Even though it was a smile, it had nothing to do with joy or happiness. The corner of his lips raised slightly, it was the smile of a hunter.

Shiroe had already decided.

(Ara ara... Shiroe-sama is...)

He could not be dissuaded.

That's what Henrietta thought at this point in time.

She felt that stopping him was pointless; Shiroe was determined to see this through.

Henrietta's father was a broker. She remembered her father would have this expression when challenging big corporations, or when the market went into a selling frenzy. He would not be home for days, or just sleep for

a while, take a shower, and rush out at dawn. As he closed the door, he would have a smile like a fierce tiger.

At the same time Henrietta understands why Maryele felt conflicted.

Hamelin had the support of the big guilds, their customers Black Sword Knights and Silver Sword were currently using 'EXP Pot' to go beyond level 90.

This was something only a resource-rich 'A class' guild could carry out by brute force. But this method might evolve to the next level.

Taking 'EXP Pot' from beginners to sell, Henrietta despised this method, in terms of ethics. If you suggested implementing this method, it would definitely be rejected by everyone.

But you also could not say that this was an "unforgivable crime".

No matter how much psychological pressure or how much coercion was involved, those beginners joined the guild by their own free will. And since they were in the guild, the action of taking and selling was not against the rules of the game, and by extension not against the law of the world.

(Law... its existence is more questionable than a summer morning's mirage, furthermore...)

Furthermore, there was the problem of execution.

Assume this method... ignoring whether it was legal, it was evil. If you ask if anyone or any group could punish and stop these evil ways, the answer would be no.

Big guilds had big influence, there was no player crazy enough to go against them without any incentives. Their members could use the guild's name to receive preferential treatment when using the city's facilities. And they were nasty about it, treating members of small guilds rudely, much to everyone's disgust.

In this situation, accepting Shiroe's view would mean opposing the big guilds. Maryele led the Crescent Moon Alliance, a small but independent group. Henrietta understood the meaning behind her serious expression.

Without needing to discuss about justice, there was no one who had the authority, influence, or power to enforce it. Hence, justice was just a

theoretical concept, it didn't matter whether you had it or not. This made the people lose interest in it, that was the undeniable truth of Akiba.

(Mary...)

Henrietta bit her lip.

Shiroe was their benefactor, she also admired him on a personal level.

But this is only under the premise 'among the many guys who are not cute'. Henrietta thought this young man was a worthy friend. But even so, she was unable to accept some 'requests'.

She should have been the one to warn Shiroe in advance and stop him from losing control.

But in the face of Shiroe's fearless determination, she was unable to say it.

The normally introspective and low profile Shiroe was displaying his intention to do battle. Henrietta was not confident in judging if she was qualified to interject.

Maryele shifted her gaze to Henrietta wanting to say something. After hesitating several times, she said:

"Shiro-bou... I can understand how you feel, but... I... No, for us..."

This should be a rejection line. The guild master did not leave the task to her deputies Henrietta or Shouryuu, opting to reject Shiroe's request herself.

Henrietta understood that her words might anger Shiroe and fracture their friendship, but she was still determined to say it.

But Shiroe interrupted Maryele.

"Mary-nee, sorry but let me finish, I am only halfway done. The Hamelin incident is just a side quest. It is not enough to just solve this incident, that is not enough to reach my goal. This is just a small mission to do on my way to the main objective. Allow me to explain, I don't like the atmosphere in Akiba. It is ugly, substandard and shameful."

With the others dumbstruck, Shiroe continued as if he had accepted all this.

"That is why I want to clean up Akiba. Hamelin is just a thing on the side, Minori and Tohya are my friends, so I want to help them. But even that is just a side event. We have many things that we need to do, we cannot waste time on things like this."

Shouryuu, Henrietta, and even Maryele were frozen like statues, Shiroe continued:

"When did staying in a small guild become a bad thing, that the members have to be on their toes when going about their business? Susukino has fallen into neglect, but there are only 2000 people there, so the big guild controlling everything is acceptable. But Akiba is our capital city, where half the people in Japan reside, the biggest server city in Japan. But it is now substandard, with the air of danger and gunpowder, everyone is walking with their heads down... It shouldn't be like this right? Doesn't that mean that we had lived our lives until now to become substandard? Hogging farming spots, the rise of big guilds, political infighting, I won't say that these are bad things, but I do not wish to see everyone head down the path of extinction. Are we going to let these things go on at the expense of the beginners? All of us trapped in this alternate world should be working together to survive, but we are ignoring this fact and doing all these things instead? Even though we have 30,000 people, we are just 30,000 in number, everyone is too naive... We are taking this world too lightly, too lacking in ambition."

Speechless.

This speech was not reasonable.

Shouryuu, Henrietta, and even Maryele were frozen in place; this must have been a topic they had never given much thought about.

Shiroe wanted to rescue his friends, that was understandable. But he wanted to destroy a guild, that was already beyond common sense. Now he wanted to change the trend and situation in the city, that was beyond illogical; you could say that he was insane.

More so than the speech's content, it was his tone that shocked them. His voice was stable and not heated, as if reinforced by steel, sharp enough to cut.

Henrietta let out the air in her chest.

She was wrong about this young man Shiroe. She thought that he was able and gentle, introspective and shy. Instead, he was very pure and simple, not only focused on achieving his goals, but direct in his methods, efficient and merciless.

In terms of battle, this young man stayed true to this simple policy. He might have been indecisive before, and his blade might have turned dull. But once he set his heart on it he would go all in.

"Mary...san?"

Shouryuu asked. Maryele was biting her lips. Destroying a guild was a heavy and risky quest for Crescent Moon Alliance. By extension, she could not agree to Shiroe's request.

But Shiroe said he wanted to "change the whole city"; this meant that if they won this gamble, the reward will be three levels higher.

That was why Maryele was hesitant. The reward here was the increase in influence of the small guilds, but this was not only a question about incentive.

There was also a mental issue.

"I..."

"Everyone please give me your support."

For the first time, Shiroe lowered his head.

"Shiroe-sama? What about your companions?"

Henrietta interjected, buying time to let Maryele think. Normally Akatsuki and Naotsugu would be with Shiroe.

"They are carrying out investigations and preparations, sorry for informing you so late. I registered a guild recently. The guild name is Log Horizon, members include Naotsugu, Akatsuki, Nyanta, and me as the guild master. This mission is the first battle of our guild."

"You... started a guild."

"That's right. I rejected your invitation to join earlier, I am sorry."

"No..."

Maryele shook her head like a child.

"No, you don't need to apologize for this. So it was like that, Shiro-bou... congrats, you formed a guild, Shiro-bou formed a guild and is building his own place to call his own..."

Maryele smiled with small beads of tears in her eyes.

Shiroe who had avoided guilds, had his own place now. Henrietta was unable to guess the meaning behind this, but she understood the reason behind Maryele's tears. Maryele, her warm and gentle friend was happy for Shiroe from the bottom of her heart.

"Guild master, can we listen to the details? I am interested in this since we operate in the city a lot. I can also feel the negative air Shiroe-san described, I also worry about the city heading in this direction forever. My heart feels like rainy weather in regard to this issue."

Shouryuu expressed his thoughts.

In the guild, he was in the battle team, so he understood the situation. He also understood he could cause more worry and trouble for Maryele if he shot his mouth off. But it was plain to see that Maryele was caught in a dilemma between wanting to help and needing to protect her guild.

Henrietta supported Shouryuu:

"That's right, we need to know how we can assist before deciding. Shiroe-sama, you came with a plan in mind correct?"

Maryele wanted to take the hit, but her subordinates were leading the conversation now. This makes her look a bit timid, so she pushed Shiroe. "Shiro-bou, please explain."

Receiving the go-ahead, Shiroe looked as if he were organizing his thoughts, but he blurted out the conclusion suddenly.

"I need money, 5,000,000 gold coins."

"This amount is too absurd!"

Henrietta shouted. She oversaw the banking account of Crescent Moon Alliance and had a good grasp on their finances.

The Crescent Moon Alliance had 60,000 in the bank. If it sold all their items they could get 100,000. If it sold the personal belongings of all the members, maybe they could reach 500,000.

But this was the best-case scenario, you might not reach this amount. Henrietta, at level 90 had about 20,000, you were considered rich if you had 50,000. Putting this into consideration, 5 million was an extraordinary amount.

"How do we get our hands on so much money? I know this is obvious, but we are just a small guild!"

"You... You... You want to borrow money?"

Henrietta and Shouryuu let out a cry of despair.

If it was fighting battles or manual labor they were willing to try their best. But this sudden change in tempo made them feel that Shiroe was asking for the impossible.

"What does Henrietta-san think?"

"Me?"

"Henrietta-san, you studied business in the real world, and are in the accounting business correct? I think it can be done, because the people are still belittling this world. It is very simple, we just need to take the initiative. Money is the start, to solve the problems, there are harder challenges ahead."

"...initiative."

Henrietta's consciousness reached out to the city.

A ripple spread with Shiroe's word at its center.

...Taking this world too lightly, belittling this world.

Why did Shiroe said that? Why did he say belittle? This was the world of Elder Tales, you could say this was an alternate world, you can also say it is a familiar world.

"There is no need to think too deeply about the means of getting the money or who it will come from, since they will not play by the rules... The rules here are 'there are no rules', we have not set any restrictive laws."

This point from a certain point of view was just a mess.

But Henrietta understood. She and Shiroe might be the only 2 people in this room who understood. There was no way for Henrietta to tell if she really understood. But she still needed to contribute her expertise in this field and judge in Maryele's place.

What Shiroe meant...

(He wants us to come up with a plan to raise the funds....)

Shiroe was like advocating defeating all the adversaries. In other words, he intended to rob them, this made Henrietta dizzy.

Robbery did not solely refer to violent means. In fact, illegal or cruel methods were unneeded. Even if the world were under a perfect legal system, 'robbery' was still very common. The world was such a place, Henrietta already knew that from her father.

She thought that methods that caused retaliation were idiotic, breaking the law was unethical, a card that should not be used unless there was no other way. The best way was to earn money while making everybody happy.

"... Can be done."

Henrietta nodded in agreement.

"We can raise the money."

"Ah?"

"Hmm?"

Henrietta replied while still deep in thought. She was organizing and touching up the details of a plan.

"It doesn't end with raising the money, right? What is going to follow?"

If Henrietta's hunch was correct, the young man before her eyes had a terrible idea.

Similar to burning the house down to get rid of rats, or buying a store just for a few T-shirts, she felt that Shiroe was capable of such things.

No matter how ridiculous, if this were the only way to achieve his goal, Shiroe would take the plunge.

"Raising 5 million is the ticket, the biggest challenge is after that, and that is... Everybody's kindness, dreams, and hopes. If the majority of Akiba's citizens do not care how the atmosphere of Akiba is, that will mean we have failed. But that is something we cannot help. If that is really the case, I will not be attached to this city. But I believe that is not so, the number of people who like Akiba will definitely be more than those who hate it. It might be a bit late to say this, but I don't intend to use Serara's incident as a bargaining chip. I came to the Crescent Moon Alliance because I need your support, there are some things I would like Mary-nee, Henrietta-san, and Shouryuu to help me with. I will say this again, everyone please lend me your strength."

Shiroe bowed deeply.

Shouryuu nodded his head slightly, Maryele turned to observe Henrietta.

Shiroe was serious, he really thought it could be done. And he wanted to execute his plan. That's why, when Shouryuu wanted to learn more, Maryele hesitated.

Shiroe was someone who could give his all for others, but more than giving his all, asking for help was difficult for him.

Henrietta thought that was a noble resolve.

Even if it were a ridiculous battle against the whole Akiba city, if Shiroe was serious, he could find a chance for victory.

That was what Henrietta's financial instinct told her.

"Mary, we will follow your decision."

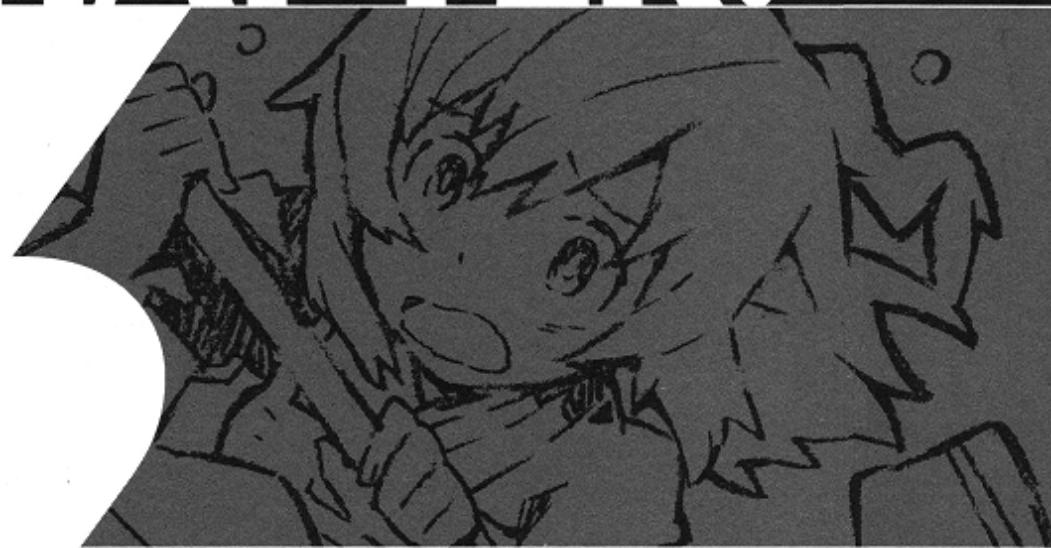
"I... we the Crescent Moon Alliance..."

Maryele clenched her fist tightly and replied with the expression of a guild master.

"The Crescent Moon Alliance is willing to take part in Shiroe's battle... We also wish for Akiba to become a more colorful city. If we carry on like this, we might lose something that is precious to us all. But... but we are also having a hard time running the guild, so if you intend to take our money

and run, please don't... But there is no other way, if we ignore this anymore, our hearts will sink all the way... This is a psychological problem, so we also want to take a shot at this. Tell us the strategy Shiro-bou; if we don't do our part while we still can, we will regret it forever."

CHAPTER.



SUNFLOWER AND LILY OF THE VALLEY

[ひまわりと鈴蘭]

► NAME: MINORI

► LEVEL: 6

► RACE: HUMAN

► CLASS: KANNAGI

► HP: 447

► MP: 458

► ITEM 1:
[BELLCHIME STAFF OF PRAYER]

BEGINNER RESTORATION TYPE EQUIPMENT EXCLUSIVE TO KANNAGI. AT THE HEAD OF THE STAFF ARE BELLS THAT GIVE A REFRESHING CHIME. IF THERE ARE ALLIED HEALERS NEARBY, THEIR SPELLS GAIN A SLIGHT RANGE INCREASE.

► ITEM 2:
[SPARROW'S CHARM BELL]

QUEST REWARD OBTAINED AFTER ACQUIRING AN INJURED SPARROW, CROSSING WITH IT THROUGH A MONSTER-INFESTED FIELD, HEALING ITS WOUNDS, AND RETURNING IT TO ITS NEST. MINORI LOVES THIS SPARROW-SHAPED CHARM, WHICH FELL FROM THE SPARROW'S NEST AFTER CLEARING THE QUEST.

► ITEM 3:
[WHITE HITOKATA]

OIBAMAI POLORED INTO A HUMAN SHAPE. THEY MILDLY INCREASE THE EFFECT OF DAMAGE-BLOCKING SPELLS, BUT ARE CONSUMABLE ITEMS THAT BURN UP AFTER USE. EXPENSIVE RELATIVE TO THE PROTECTION THEY PROVIDE, BUT MINORI ALWAYS KEEPS A FEW ON HAND "JUST IN CASE".

<table width=60%><tr><td width=20%; valign="top">Name: Minori

Level: 6

Race: Human

Class: Kannagi

HP: 447

MP: 458<td>Equipment:

Bellchime Staff of Prayer
 Beginner Restoration-magic item specific to Kannagi. At the head of the staff are bells that give a refreshing chime. If there are allied Restoration casters, their spells gain a slight range increase.

Sparrow's Charm Bell
 Quest reward obtained after escorting an injured sparrow out of a monster-infested field, healing its wounds, and returning it to its nest. Minori loves this sparrow-shaped charm, which fell from the sparrow's nest after clearing the quest.

White Hitokata
 Origami folded into a human shape. They mildly increase the effect of damage-blocking spells, but are consumable items that burn up after use. Expensive relative to the protection they provide, but Minori always keeps a few on hand "just in case".'

Chapter 03: Sunflower and Lily of the Valley

Part 1

The following day, they started four days of preparation for the battle.

It was beyond being a tight schedule, as everyone went beyond their limits in order to meet the deadline. The preparation was miraculously completed on time thanks to the efforts of everyone.

The three project leaders humbly pushed the reason for their success onto each other.

Crescent Moon Alliance's guild master, a kind motherly figure loved by everyone, Maryele said: "Our guild accountant is excellent, give her any number-related information, and she will take care of it accurately with less than 0.01% error. As long as Henrietta handled the accounts, both the demons in hell and the angels with their trumpets will piss themselves and beg for forgiveness." She finished by proudly sticking out her voluminous chest.

The accountant Henrietta said with her blond, curly hair swaying slightly, "I feel that my management skills have been pushed to the limits.

Shiroe-sama's naturally cold-blooded proposal is vicious to the point of absurdity, to the point where it shakes the heavens. Calling him Shiroe is like a joke, we should refer to him as Pitch-Black Kuroe. If not for Akatsuki-chan, I would want to offer myself to him." Shiroe was unable to tell from her words if she were praising, joking, or putting him down.

As for the Shiroe who was being bullied, he pushed up his falling glasses and said in a sincere tone: "I think my darkness is only good for fooling 3 year-old kids. This cannot be compared to Mary-nee's kind nature. Even when the guild members are exhausted, they will still push on for her encouraging smile. In order to earn Mary-nee's praise and acknowledgement, people will even rise from the dead." He was dead serious as he said these words.

Anyway, the schedule set by these three had pushed Akatsuki, Naotsugu, Nyanta, and the Crescent Moon Alliance to their limits. For the members with shallow experience, this was a literal 'deadline'. The people taking part in the plan were like zombies returning to life after being encouraged. After

finishing the preparations, they ushered in the morning where they began executing the plan.

That very morning.

As Akiba moved into the summer, the sun rose slightly earlier everyday. As the day started to get warmer, temporary stores that looked fancy but at the same time shabby appeared in three different locations.

A canvas was propped up by bundles of bamboo and wood cut to size, creating a big tent. Akin to a fair or event, colorful banners fluttered in the sky. In the center of the tent was a modified horse carriage serving as a store. The only stylish decoration was the wooden counter table.

The design of the store varied slightly in each location, but all of them had colorful flying flags and banners as a signboard with colorful letters that said 'Crescent Moon'.

In today's Akiba, restaurants and street stores were a dying business.

Because all the food had the same taste.

Following the setting of the game era of Elder Tales, the NPCs would operate beverage stations and bars, and many hotels also provided meals.

But all the meals available had the same taste, from the cheap 'bean with rice' or top-level grilled chicken, all of them tasted like soggy crackers. No grease or flavor; even if it were moist it was still hard to swallow, making you depressed as you ate.

It was the same with beverages. No matter what it was, even if the color was different, the smell and taste were just like well water. The only difference was alcohol, which tasted like water but made you warm inside, and eventually drunk.

Since that was the case, no one went to restaurants or bars anymore.

There were still some who were looking for a place to rest and headed towards these places. Compared to talking in the central square, a place with shade and chairs was much more comfortable. There was indeed a need for such services, but they were not there for the food.

They would only order the cheapest food as their 'chair rental' fee.

Most players in Akiba bought their food directly from NPCs.

All the food had the same taste, so if you could get the necessary nutrients, the only criteria would be price.

High-class food had the added effect of improving base stats for a short time, so battle guilds might need such items, but the demand was only a minority, probably less than 1 percent.

The majority of the players treated food as just something you needed when you were hungry, so buying cheap food was enough.

This led to a drastic price war.

The production rate for food in this world was very fast, and even the most high-level food could be made from the menu in 10 seconds.

If there were enough ingredients, a chef could make 300 meals in an hour. Chef was not a popular subclass, but the supply of cheap food in the market was still overwhelming.

The manufacturers did not need to pay too much attention in getting the ingredients for high-class food. In this slow economy, low quality products were enough to meet the market demand, so just supplying cheap meals was enough.

Even though eating was necessary and there was a steady demand for it in the market, the price continued to fall. Even though it was one of the three basic desires of consumers, it was no match for the fact that food no longer had taste.

'Since the market is so harsh, why are you opening a restaurant?' This was what the citizens thought as they saw the flag and banners.

All the chefs entrusted their goods to the NPC marketplace to sell. This was not only convenient, but it also avoided the pressure of selling it upfront by yourself. This was to be expected as there was no joy in selling tasteless food to the customers who were buying it solely for subsistence. All chefs want to see their customers enjoying their food, and so chefs have all but disappeared from the storefront.

But as the sun rose to a good angle, just one hour before noon, the shock wave started to spread.

Probably made by some guild or chef, big boxes of food arrived at the three stores, and an unfamiliar fragrance spread in the air.

It was the enchanting smell of grease and spice.

A lady with a voluptuous body walked to the front of the store, with her green hair flowing behind her, and started shouting,

"We are opening today, please visit our store! We are from Crescent Moon! For the people who are sick of the tasteless food, we bring good news! Now is the time to resume eating normally! It's tasty, very delicious! So good that your jaw will drop!"

Maryele shouted as if she had given up her self-esteem.



Guild tailors made uniforms with a white blouse and skirts with vertical pink stripes. There were also bright orange ribbon bow ties and aprons with lotus designs on its edge; this was the standard appearance for fast food restaurants in the real world.

Serara, who was standing by, raised her tiny voice with a 'refuse to lose' attitude,

"Thank you! Thank you everyone! Thank you for your patronage!"

Maybe she was too tense, but she was handing out brochures while shouting 'thank you' repeatedly to the crowd.

Crescent Burger 15 gold, Super Crescent Burger for 30 gold. Fried Chicken(1 piece) 18 gold, (3 pieces) for 50 gold. Fish & Chips(small) 10 gold, (large) for 20 gold. Black Rose Tea(1 cup) 5 gold, (1 bottle) for 15 gold.

The brochures contained promotional slogans as well as the price list.

The menu was more highbrow than a real world fast food chain, but it still brought a sense of nostalgia to the players.

A few customers were drawn by the fragrance and curiosity to the store.

The price was honestly quite steep.

A one-night stay in the cheapest room cost 10 gold in the city, meals could be bought for 5 gold. The price at Crescent Moon was 3 to 6 times the average price, so it was not a small expense.

But it was not an impossible price.

The expenses needed to live in this world were small, for example sleeping, the worst you could do was use a sleeping bag instead of renting a room.

There were many ruins and abandoned buildings in the city; if you just wanted shelter from the outdoors you could stay there. Food was plentiful and cheap, clothes were not something you needed to change frequently.

If you wanted to live luxuriously there were no limits, but if you wanted to live a simple life, 15 gold would be enough. In this world, guild hall maintenance fees and equipment repairs both required gold, so it was hard

for players to amass fortunes, but it was easy to earn the money to get by everyday.

You might start to hesitate when spending 1000 gold on magic items or equipment, but 10+ gold was just chump change.

With this in mind, members from the crowd purchased a few of the items.

Maryele and Serara received incoming customers with a warm smile, serving the food that was just delivered by the young male members of the guild. They would also thank the customer with a smile and say "thank you for your patronage" together.

The first customer who only purchased out of curiosity bit into his food with a mixture of shyness and expectation. And, with just one bite he received a shock that made his legs feel like jelly.

"This! This! What is this?"

There was taste. You could only use these three words to describe it, but for the people who experienced it first hand, this was a joy that made the world spin.

Meat had the taste of meat.

The lettuce was crisp with the flavor and grease of the meat, mixing elegantly with the sour taste of the tomato.

The sweetness of the lightly toasted bun, the smoothness of the butter, the sting of the yellow mustard.

Every taste was refreshing and moving.

In terms of completeness, this was still far from perfection. In the real world, this taste was akin to family restaurants'; it was not good enough to be featured in gourmet magazines. But you could definitely say that this was the peak of taste in this world.

This man concentrated on eating his meal with teary eyes.

This must be the best food he ever had. Before he could process this thought, the burger was already gone.

He even licked the grease inside the box packaging clean.

He did not feel any shame.

If he felt any shame, he would have stopped his tears from flowing.

The shock he felt spread across Akiba in less than an hour.

This was a revolutionary discovery, as if people from a black and white environment were suddenly thrown into a colorful world.

The citizens of Akiba started to recall how much vitality they had lost. The masses had even forgotten the importance of delicious food, which they had given up pursuing.

Crescent Moon became Akiba's new legend.

Part 2

Maryele's office was like a battlefield.

In front of her table was another simple meeting table, her couch had been pushed to a corner, documents piled up on the table like mountains.

All of them were full of words written by Henrietta who did the accounting and Shiroe who directed the operation.

After the impact-filled opening day, it was already 10 pm when the Crescent Moon Alliance members returned. They were much more exhausted than from fighting monsters for a whole day.

The stamina of the players matched that of the Elder Tales game era. That was to say, they were related to the player's levels. The majority of the guild members were only mid-level, so they were like this. In fact, they should be complimented for their effort. But Shiroe and Henrietta had no time to spare for the store operation team. They were battling the documents akin to escaping from demons in hell.

The paper and ink produced by Shiroe using his scribe abilities sat in the corner of the room. Henrietta took a stack of them and wrote new numbers down without saying a word. She raised her head and let out a long sigh.

"The accounts for today are done."

"Thank you for your hard work."

Hearing that, Shiroe stopped his pen and looked up.

"If you want to reward me, give Akatsuki-chan to me."

"... I can't give her to you, but you have permission to toy with her for an hour."

"Wah!"

Henrietta's eyes sparkled and she twisted her body in joy. Shiroe averted his eyes, and picked up the paper she was writing on.

"The wastage rate is lower than expected."

"Because the customers just keep coming, you can say that we have reached our targeted sales."

"If that is the case, then the problem will be in the ingredient stock..."

"That is right."

The numbers were within their projected values. It was a good number too. But this didn't mean there were no problems. The running of the stores used up all the manpower available to the Crescent Moon Alliance. Since it was food, it would surely deplete the ingredient stocks.

Everyone had been hunting the monsters for food and filling up the storage during the preparation period. Even on the opening day, a team led by Naotsugu and Shouryuu was out hunting for ingredients. According to the depletion rate, the stocks would last for 4 more days.

"...Ingredients are hard to gather."

"Want to start purchasing in bulk?"

"We will need to wait for Mary-nee to report for that part."

Shiroe and Henrietta continued manipulating a few figures, doing simulations through different ways. For instance, decreasing or increasing the menu or adjusting the selling price up or down.

No matter what combination they used, the stock wouldn't last more than 5 days. For the Crescent Moon Alliance's storage and manpower, this was the limit.

"Sorry for intruding... Wrong, this is my room."

Just as they were reaching for tea after finishing their discussion, Maryele entered the room after opening the door wide. Even though she was not drawn there by their discussion, Maryele was in high spirits as she walked in and gently petted Shiroe's head.

"Good work Shiro-bou, and you too, Henrietta."

As Maryele stuffed Henrietta's face into her huge chest with a hug, Henrietta replied calmly as if this were normal,

"Welcome back Mary."

Maryele didn't return to her table, opting to take a seat in a chair beside the meeting table. She poured black leaf tea into 3 glasses from a bottle she claimed she stole from the kitchen. This was sold in the franchise as "Black Rose Tea", but had nothing to do with roses, just Henrietta's preference.

"How is it? What are the sales like!"

Maryele asked with sparkling eyes.

(This part is the character of people from Osaka... but it is cute so that's okay.)

Shiroe sighed while Henrietta read out her report.

"Store revenue is 43,776 gold, a total of 1,159 sales were made, average sale is 38 gold. Crescent Burger and Super Crescent Burger sold out, the side meals other than Black Rose Tea also sold out."

"That's incredible! Outstanding! 40,000 gold is, let me think, compared to our guild's monthly budget..."

"40 times."

"That's right, 40 times! We made a killing! If we maintain this pace, 5 million will be ours in no time!"

Maryele danced happily at the table. Shiroe shifted his gaze from her bouncing breasts and said,

"Mary-nee, this is not fast enough."

"Is that so?"

"Using rough estimation, this will take 120 days, that is over 3 months correct?"

"Wait a minute, we have been apologizing to the customers the whole day! If we want to sell, there are still lots of customers, so we need more stock."

Shiroe raised his hand interrupting Maryele and retorted,

"Potential customers should be more than 10,000. Since Akiba has at least 15,000 players, that is not the problem. The problem is with the number of stores the guild members can operate, and the number of merchandise we can prepare."

"Is that so?"

Maryele gave a confused expression that suggested she did not understand. Henrietta explained in detail for her,

"Hmm, that's right, the time to serve a customer and complete a transaction, let's assume is 3 minutes for 1 sale. 1 hour is 20 people, 8 hours is 160 people, 10 staff can serve 1600 customers. Even if the whole guild takes part in sales, we can only serve 4000 people. And that is ignoring deliveries, cooking, and administrative work, just solely concentrating on sales, so it is not a sustainable number... Because of this, I feel that our business plan has a good balance of manpower between sales, cooking, delivery, and miscellaneous. This stable situation can continue for the long term, and our profits..."

Henrietta pointed to the documents like a teacher.

"Should be similar to the result today, about 1000... In other words, with the scale of the Crescent Moon Alliance, no matter how much we want to, we can only handle 1000 orders per day."

"I see... I mean, this is such a good chance to rake in the cash but..."

After listening to the analysis, Maryele frowned at the missed opportunity, but brightened up immediately and asked,

"Hey, should we recruit more people? I think that this is a good chance to expand our numbers. Our stock has the most potential in Akiba right now, we are the miraculous Crescent Moon franchise, right?"

"We cannot do that."

Shiroe raised his objection.

"It is not good to doubt others, but the new recruits will probably all be spies. We are busy enough as it is, we have no time to handle this."

"I agree with that too."

Henrietta chipped in.

Maryele sighed as she said,

"Is that so..."

"Mary-nee, our objective in the end is not to raise funds."

"Hmmm... you are right! I was blinded for a moment by the cash we are raking in... But it is a pain to have no money right? If we go at the current pace, it will take 3 months, that will be too late... So we need to use the other plan? Can it succeed?"

Maryele asked timidly, making Henrietta smile.

"Relax, a normal merchant will not reject us. Trust me, if such an idiot exists, he should be executed by guillotine."

Shiroe smiled sheepishly at Henrietta.

The plan was moving in line with Shiroe's prediction.

(I will be expecting great things from this two-man show...)

Shiroe confirmed the plan in his mind; the negotiation in the next few days would be critical with no room for error.

"I leave the negotiation details in your hands, Henrietta-san."

"Roger, leave it to me."

Henrietta nodded slightly, giving her princess smile.

"Mary-nee, I leave restocking to you."

"I understand, but, I am not good with numbers..."

"You just need to get the other party to agree, I will come along to discuss the details. Or should I say, I will do both the restocking and the negotiations together, this will be easier."

Henrietta was far more capable than Shiroe imagined. He felt her aptitude for business during normal conversations, but he did not expect her to be so excellent.

Maryele, who was a bit clumsy, but accommodating, needed companions like Henrietta and Shouryuu to assist her.

Shiroe recalled Akatsuki who was traveling the city carrying out her special mission and Naotsugu, who was doing stock takes even though he had been farming the whole day, as well as Nyanta, who was preparing the Crescent Burgers for tomorrow.

(Everyone is working up to expectations, and even giving higher standards than the targeted goal. If we fail in the end, the fault will lie totally on me...)

"What is the matter Shiro-bou?"

"Nothing."

(Am I worthy of being their teammate?)

That thought flashed through his mind.

But that was only for an instant. For the sake of the companions that had been waiting for him, in order to not let them become fakes, he had the responsibility to match up to them.

Just as he promised Akatsuki that day, just as he pledged before Naotsugu, Nyanta, Maryele, and everyone.

No, 'worthy or not', this question was a meaningless and pretentious one. What mattered was making the plan work, to play out his role as the plan proposer who needed everybody's help in the slew of ongoing operations.

"I will finish up the preparation work for the meeting. What we can do now is to prepare ourselves. By not exposing our ace in the hole, let's set up a grand festival."

Maryele put her fingertips together in an absent-minded manner, letting out a sigh yet again. She was always confident and smiling in front of others, but when she had to operate in an unknown field, she had no confidence.

She understood the reason Shiroe requested her to attend to this personally.

Since she was a guild master operating in Akiba, her circle of friends was wide. The person she was meeting was also an acquaintance; in some ways he was easy to communicate with... but he was also a famous and influential man.

Maryele adjusted her clothes once again.

She was wearing her most fancy dress, but she could not calm down. This was quite natural, since she didn't have any experience with negotiating in-game, which was rare for most players too.

Elder Tales' costume... not long ago it was a type of equipment, but it had a high degree of freedom.

When adventuring or hunting, the only things that mattered were the stats when choosing equipment. In Elder Tales, barring some exceptions, the equipment was all middle-ages European fantasy in design. Vanguards would wear plate armor while the second rows would wear chainmail or leather armor.

Healers have all kinds of armor to choose from, but Maryele, the cleric, preferred heavy armor, such as a light breastplate and leather accessories, a tight fit shirt, pants, and a cloak. The guild crest could be added and the color customized. For equipment chosen for their performance, its appearance could not be altered too much.

But the clothes for moving around the city could be customized more freely.

Elder Tales was a middle-ages fantasy style RPG, but it did not follow the classical style totally. The design was influenced by current trends and fashion.

Middle-ages European fantasy designs were the default, but clothes unique to ethnic groups, uniforms, and maid outfits were also available.

Designs influenced by manga and anime have a large following in the fashion culture.

As for the 'module and information' for the items, the outsourced developing company and the various servers maintenance companies had been given a lot of freedom, which was only natural.

This world was different from earth. This zone which was representative of Japan had low humidity. In this summer season, there were plenty of clothes to choose from. Ranging from shorts and cotton shirts for the casual feel, fantasy-style long robes, Greek-style loose robes, or Japanese kimono, to iron-clad warriors, and high-class tailored suits, players had a variety of dresses.

Maryele was wearing a white silk blouse and a tight-fitting long skirt, without any jacket. She had a loose scarf on her shoulders. The guild's tailor made a V with her fingers symbolizing victory, but Maryele worried if this outfit was suitable.

"Don't look so lost."

Henrietta sat beside her said while looking in front.

Henrietta tied her blond wavy hair with a black ribbon and wore a black and white formal dress.

Maryele looked at her and thought that she could be so popular if she had her very own style.

"Is it okay..."

"Don't be so insecure. You need to be strong when negotiating. This is just the first step in the challenge we must overcome. Even if we fail, we can just try again with someone else, it's not like we have no room for error."

Maryele nodded in reply.

Today's negotiation topic was securing the supply of ingredients. If they could not replenish their depleting stock, they would still be fine tomorrow, but the day after would begin to affect the operation.

Inversely, if they succeeded in settling the ingredient supply problem, Crescent Moon Alliance could concentrate on cooking and sales.

What followed would be...

(Let's worry about what follows in the future. We have Shiroe and Henrietta with us, and as long as I do my part, Shiroe will take care of the rest. I need to give my all in this negotiation.)

"But... if today's negotiation goes well, it will make the later challenges easier, so don't relax, and give it your all."

"Boohoo, please don't give me more pressure..."

Just when Maryele was cheering up, Henrietta gave a cool retort, making Maryele feel feeble. Everyone had things they were good and bad at; Maryele understood that she would never learn how to maintain a poker face.

"Hi! Sorry for the wait!"

A player with sharp eyes appeared. He was a human with hazel hair and eyes. His name was Charasin, guild master of 8th District Shopping Center, one of Akiba's top 3 production guilds.

Charasin greeted them warmly after closing the door, and proceeded to sit down.

This was a room in a bar near the central square, available for 2 hours at the price of a few gold coins, suitable for private conversation. Maryele and Charasin had met before.

They went raiding together during their time as beginners.

Maryele and Charasin both started their own guilds, and had had no chance to raid together since, but the relationship between the guilds was quite good.

Charasin's guild, 8th District Shopping Center, and Crescent Moon Alliance were located in different zones; exchanging information would be convenient for the both of them. Because of this, the two of them still kept in contact.

"Wah, Mary-san has a scary expression, what can I do for you today?"

Because they were quite close, Charasin expressed his concern gently.

The two of them went way back, but the scale of operation between 8th District Shopping Center and Crescent Moon Alliance was different.

Crescent Moon Alliance had about 30 people. It was a mutual assisting group, but the fact was, the guild was a loose group where anything goes. It was made up of mid-level players, where members with common interests went adventuring together.

Charasin's guild, 8th District Shopping Center, was a pure production guild. It did not provide battle or exploration support. The main activities of the players were the exchange of raw ingredients, bulk sales, production, and trade. It had 700 members, ranking number three behind Oceanic System and The Rodrick Firm among the production guilds.

The face of battle changed dramatically after the Catastrophe.

Shiroe and Naotsugu, who were experienced gamers, could observe the changes in battle, including the skills and abilities of the monsters, and adjust to them. But for the majority of the players, the biggest change was the horror of battling in person.

Even if you could win easily against low-level monsters, it was still a frightening experience to fight. Sword, axe, fang, claw, fire, or curses would come flying at you. Even if you could logically understand that you could handle it if your level were high enough, the number of players who refrained from fighting because of its bloody nature was not small.

Even if this were an alternate world, even if you were stuck here, even if fighting monsters were the most efficient way of making money, you should refrain from fighting if you could... it was more than expected for people to have this kind of thought.

The actual amount could not be determined, but Maryele estimated that after the Catastrophe, about half the population preferred to avoid battling. The production guilds gained popularity among the players and expanded their member base.

In Akiba, the biggest production guild was Oceanic System with 2500 members, followed by The Rodrick Firm with 1800 members.

Adding the guild led by the man sitting right in front, the 8th District Shopping Center's 700 members, the three guilds numbered 5000

members. There were also other smaller guilds. Before the Catastrophe, players who focused solely on production were rare, but this had changed.

"Today, I have a request for the 8th District Shopping Center."

Maryele explained.

"What is the request?"

Maryele was more serious than usual, so Charasin replied candidly. Charasin had already guessed the reason behind this meeting.

Maryele successfully operated Crescent Moon.

In the eyes of the production guild, she was at the top of the food industry. Just like a person who was used to a colorful world would find it hard entering a world without color, players who ate the food with taste could not go back to eating a tasteless product akin to chewing wax.

Maryele had received reports that the price of food in the open market was dropping drastically.

Elder Tales was no longer a game.

Without a way of logging out, this was their reality now. Even if you could not die here, no one could deny the fact that you could not avoid living on as well.

The 30,000 players in the Japanese server needed to live here, unable to escape.

To exaggerate, in this far east region, the control of the food industry lay in the hands of the Crescent Moon Alliance. At least that was how Charasin saw it.

(Wah, Charasin is all business-like, leading a big guild is not that simple indeed.)

Charasin remained stately despite having a tense air around him, making Maryele form this opinion. If Henrietta did not instruct her with "We have the initiative in all the meetings, so we need to take a strong stance", she would have been pushed around easily.

"We would like to commission a supply guarantee request. The ingredient stocks in our guild are depleting fast, so we need to outsource the supply. The items we need are young deer meat, lettuce, tomato, flour, potato, sun sun fish, and thunder bird meat... that is about all. We can discuss the price and amount separately, but you can assume we need a huge quantity."

"Buying in bulk..."

Charasin replied curtly.

He expected this, and in a way this was natural.

Crescent Moon Alliance was a small guild, and as everyone expected, running such a big operation would deplete their stocks in a blink of the eye, and they would need to stop supplying their merchandise.

The amount of members, how many ingredients they could farm themselves... After considering all this, they came up with this request. Be it Maryele or Charasin who just found out about this, this was easy to understand.

"... What about the price and quantity?"

Maryele took out a piece of paper and gave him a few figures.

"Is that so..."

Charasin breathed slowly and seemed to be deep in thought, deciding if he should take up the commission.

Normally, this was a good deal; a guild like 8th District Shopping Center had many raw items in stock. There had been a price war recently, so if he could dump the stock that was worthless in the market at a reasonable price, it would help clear space in their warehouse.

If there was a need they could keep an eye on the market, buy cheap and sell high to Crescent Moon Alliance.

From the business point of view, there was no reason to reject.

This was the conclusion Maryele and Henrietta had reached.

But that didn't mean the request would be accepted easily. Maryele recalled Henrietta saying "We are now in the spotlight, they won't accept these excellent terms so easily, and will try to squeeze more benefit out of us."

After a moment of silence, Charasin smiled sociably.

He asked: "These are the ingredients for Crescent Moon?" Maryele replied with a smile "Yes".

"It seems that Crescent Moon is doing very well."

"Thanks to everyone, everyone is happy with the food, and our chef is also all smiles."

"...Is it a new recipe?"

"Our chef has excellent skills."

Maryele replied to the probing Charasin with a smile.

With a smile like a sunflower, Maryele looked gracefully prepared for anything. But the truth was, Maryele was already at her limits.

Charasin's query made her think that she had been exposed as a newbie, giving her the feeling of cold sweat.

But Shiroe instructed: "Mary-nee please maintain your beautiful smile no matter what happens. This is the most important thing. As long as you continue smiling, others will assist you in other ways."

So Maryele smiled like there was no tomorrow, free smiles for everyone. The corner of her green eyes drooped slightly, displaying a smile that could melt anything. With the combination of her voluptuous breasts and motherly nature, this could open a warm barrier that would stop anyone from further questioning her. But Maryele was unaware of this.

"I will look into this contract in detail. But in order to increase the scale of the operation, the 8th District Shopping Center and Crescent Moon Alliance can take this opportunity to..."

"Charasin, I apologize but it is almost time."

Henrietta interrupted Charasin with a clear voice.

"Time?"

"That's right, we will be talking to some other people after this."

Henrietta's calm voice made Maryele put her hands together in guilt and shame.

"I'm sorry Charasin, I gave you a bit of advantage since we know each other, but Henrietta insisted that we need to be fair."

"Eh, Mary-san, what do you mean?"

"Hmm..."

Maryele moved her gaze and observed Henrietta. This was not an act, it was real. Maryele could not stand up to Henrietta when it involved spending money.

"Even though they are deals on some other matters, we are going to have a meeting with Oceanic System and The Rodrick Firm."

"Other matters?"

"Yes. I should say it is a sponsorship. It is regarding the sale of the Crescent Moon franchise rights."

"Eh!"

Charasin's expression changed.

8th District Shopping Center was among the top 3 guilds in Akiba, but it could not compare to Oceanic System and The Rodrick Firm. Oceanic System itself had 3 times the members of 8th District Shopping Center. If they joined in, Charasin would not have any say in the negotiations.

"We want to live in harmony with everyone. 8th District Shopping Center has been taking good care of us right? And we go way back, so I want 8th District Shopping Center to be a part of this... But Henrietta says we must solve the supply issue first."

"Mary, instead of saying 'solving the issue', it should be securing a supply line first, before moving on the next stage correct?"

Henrietta frowned when she listened to Maryele, and explained it to her like she was a kid.

"Wait a moment Mary, Henrietta-san, what plans does Crescent Moon have? What do you mean by sponsorship?" Charasin's question made Maryele nervously open her mouth. Henrietta touched her lips with her slender finger, and turned towards Charasin.

"In the eyes of 8th District Shopping Center, how much is this information worth?"

Henrietta looked at Charasin with mysterious eyes. No matter how you sliced it, the commission had excellent terms for 8th District Shopping Center, with no risk of loss. Charasin squinted his eyes and made his decision with this announcement:

"8th District Shopping Center is willing to accept the commission we discussed. Including young deer meat, lettuce, tomato, flour, potato, sun sun fish, and thunder bird meat. We will prepare 3200 sets each. The first batch will arrive the day after tomorrow in the morning... price will be 50,000."

"40,000."

"...Deal, 8th District Shopping Center's Charasin accepts these terms."

"Wonderful! Charasin accepted it right? Right? We can invite him to the meeting later and discuss this together right?"

"Yes, of course."

As Henrietta nodded, a ring-tone sounded in Maryele's ear, informing her that the next batch of visitors had arrived.

Part 4

"Incredible, aren't these two great beauties and the young guild master of 8th District Shopping Center?"

"...Erm."

As informed earlier, the ones who came in were Oceanic System's Michitaka and The Rodrick Firm's Rodrick.

"This is the first time we met! I am the guild master of Crescent Moon Alliance, Maryele, and this is our guild's manager Henrietta."

"Hold on, please don't use such an old term to address me. As introduced, I am Henrietta, in charge of accounts."

They took turns addressing the guests. Maryele just loafed at home and took care of the chores, while Henrietta was an office lady with a degree in economics. Even though Henrietta was in charge of accounts, she also learned from her father. As an office lady, she knew how to handle meetings of this scale. Even though the two of them were rough on the edges, they still managed to greet them properly.

"I am Oceanic System's Michitaka, my position is the boss."

With a body that looked more like a warrior's than a merchant's, he had a strong grip as he shook hands. His arms were beefy, with obvious burn marks, possibly because he was a blacksmith.

"I am The Rodrick Firm's Rodrick, guild master of a production guild."

On the other hand, the young man introducing himself as Rodrick had a scholarly air around him. He was a pharmacist.

"Yes, I understand...understood.... Eh, I have heard about the two of you! Both of you are famous!"

Maryele smiled passionately.

In Henrietta's eyes, Maryele seemed to have taken a load off her shoulders. In the meeting earlier, Maryele was assigned to request 8th District Shopping Center to provide ingredients for this period of time. Because of this, she had already completed her assignment just now.

The negotiations now would be handled by Henrietta.

(This means that this is my battle now.)

Henrietta smiled and her intelligent eyes shone brightly. In front of her were the biggest and 2nd biggest guilds' leaders. Because their scale was too far apart, they normally wouldn't think much of Crescent Moon Alliance. Before today, Henrietta would have flinched at the thought of talking to them.

But Henrietta and her group had spent the last week preparing for this moment. All the preparation, days of farming, deliveries of goods, selling in

the hot day, collecting information like fighting a moat battle, all that was for this encounter.

This step was based on the previous step, and the step before, and the step before that, a long chain of steps. And the ones who laid the foundation was not Henrietta, but her teammates.

(If I back down now, I won't be able to face my comrades. And this is Shiroe-sama's dark scheme... If we don't win this way, other ways won't work too. Keke, to think that I am taking part in this scheme.)

Henrietta thought of herself as a second rate player, and had never challenged any big-scale raids or high-level quests. And someone like her was right in the middle of the greatest campaign since this new world began.

(My strength is able to become someone else's strength.)

(I can use my power to its limit.)

This knowledge brought a sense of determination and excitement from within.

"Erm, we also know you. You are the owner of Crescent Moon correct? You are now a celebrity in Akiba. I ate it before too, although only that one time."

Michitaka smiled as he spoke.

Maryele continued to smile cheerfully in reply, unfazed by the others.

"But on the other hand, Maryele-san of Crescent Moon, you have invited us and the other big guilds, what do you have in mind?"

Rodrick said as he gazed at Charasin, trying to guess why Charasin was here before they arrived.

"That... the meaning, regarding the meaning, that is, erm...."

"Before this, let me explain the reason why I invited 8th District Shopping Center here before the others."

Henrietta said after counting her breaths.

Explaining word by word, wary of talking too fast, trying her best to sound at ease, carefully choosing her words, controlling her tone, and explained.

"We commissioned 8th District Shopping Center to supply us with ingredients."

This sentence made Michitaka's kind expression and Rodrick's wise eye suddenly fill with tense emotion; they probably guessed how the situation was going to progress.

8th District Shopping Center had about 700 members.

Oceanic System had 2500 members, The Rodrick Firm had 1800 members. Even though their levels and expertise were different and their influence was as big as the number of members, if Crescent Moon allied with 8th District Shopping Center supplying them ingredients, they would tip the balance in their favor.

Crescent Moon started a food revolution.

But because of its small guild size, their supply was also small in scale. Akiba had more than 15,000 people; supplying 1000 meals a day was far from adequate to meet the demand.

But if they linked up with 8th District Shopping Center's 700 members, they would be able to satisfy the city's need, and the profit would be enormous.

Because it was food.

Different from clothes, furniture, weapons, armor, accessories, these types of equipment, food needed to be consumed everyday. It was gone after you ate it, and even if it were cheap, the total expenditure would still be an astronomical figure. Since it was consumable, sales could be maintained, and 8th District Shopping Center who controlled the food supply would be able to absorb more members. Over time, they would be able to overturn the current situation, this was easy to see.

Henrietta understood Michitaka and Rodrick's thought process. Food as a weapon depending on how it was used, could be a nuclear weapon capable of upsetting the balance of the production guilds.

"You mean... You are working together with 8th District Shopping Center?"

Michitaka beat Rodrick in asking the question.

His nature was straightforward, just like his appearance. This might not be the case in the real world, but for online games, popular guilds were surprisingly all led by players like that.

"No, if that was the case, there would be no need to invite us. This meeting has a different agenda correct?"

The skinny man with glasses, Rodrick said in a gentle voice.

Henrietta thought he was similar to Shiroe as both of them wore glasses, but his neuroticism was a negative trait. Even if his schemes were better than Shiroe's, he wouldn't have the courage to harbor such schemes.

Until recently, Henrietta thought that Shiroe was an introvert and his low profile nature was like Rodrick's. That was why she could feel how wide their potential difference is; the only thing they had in common was their similar appearance.

"Yes, as you said, our guild has another agenda. We hope Oceanic Systems, The Rodrick Firm, and 8th District Shopping Center can listen to our request on equal grounds."

Henrietta bowed slightly.

Negotiations were a series of probings for truths and falsehoods.

By this definition, Henrietta was in a perilous position.

The topic was raised by Henrietta. If she did not provide information, the negotiation could not continue. But giving the details would mean showing her trump card.

Her advantage was that the other party wanted to reap some benefits, and Crescent Moon was a delicious and high-yield piece of meat.

On top of that...

(As long as we control the negotiations, that will mean sharing or hiding any information will be up to us.)

Henrietta organized information that could or could not be shared like a chess player.

Shiroe set a restriction for this meeting, that was not to lie.

When probing each other, you were banned from throwing smoke bombs, which limited the freedom she could use to fight. Henrietta knew that she has to keep to this restriction since this could become a disadvantage in the future.

(Shiroe-sama is being inconsiderate... If I don't borrow Akatsuki-chan from him, this will not be worth it. Ah ah, Akatsuki-chan, black and smooth hair just like a doll...)

Henrietta's face turned red as she started to fantasize. Maryele coughed twice in a hurry to warn her.

"...Ah, sorry, let's get straight to the topic. Crescent Moon Alliance is planning a big campaign, you can also say that it is a challenge. But our guild alone is not enough to take up this challenge, so we need help from all of you."

"Erm... solving a quest?"

For Rodrick's question, Henrietta did not answer yes or no. She kept her gaze down, her lips becoming the shape of the crescent moon.

(He is mistaken...)

Quests were an event in Elder Tales where you accepted missions from an NPC or book, leading to a series of events and adventures, with a variety of content.

For example, you receive a request from an old villager to look for her daughter in the forest; to clear the goblins in a cave; head to the lion scorpion swamp and bring back its sting. Every imaginable event could be included in quests.

Elder Tales was not like single-player RPG where there was a main story line, and the quest represented a story in the game. Players could choose which level they want to take up the quest. But when Elder Tales was just a game, it claimed to have tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of quests, and no player could grasp all of the content.

With a variety of quests, there were also a variety of rewards. It might be EXP, gold, items, magical knowledge, or even some special rights. The rarer rewards were magical training and recipes for producing items.

Rodrick interpreted Henrietta's challenge as a quest. That meant he should be deducing from the word campaign that this was a quest that could not be done alone. It might need several people, or maybe even organized groups that were bigger than a party in order to challenge it.

Right now they were negotiating the knowledge of preparing food with taste in exchange for funds. But Henrietta's method was more like an idea or an inspiration.

The production guilds' leaders had sharp instinct. If there were some leak in information, even if it were not the whole thing, they would be able to infer the technique. In fact, someone else might have the same inspiration one day.

Considering this, Henrietta chose the tactics of baiting the other party. Making use of the other parties' doubt and competitive nature, luring them to say what she wanted them to say.

Not lying. But not letting them know the truth, this was Henrietta's scheme.

"So, what kind of support does Mary's side need?"

Charasin asked, which was the assist Henrietta expected. She did not answer immediately, but looked into the eyes of the 3 guild masters.

Creating an indecisive atmosphere was also a necessary preparation during negotiations.

She knew her ally Maryele was still displaying her smile like a sunflower as the three young men looked at the two ladies.

(Mary is a beauty after all, she would be my type if she were not so tall. I would want to bring her home to be my hug pillow... Ah, Charasin-sama's face is red, seems like he has a thing for Mary, so pure...)

In reality, the three of them were looking at Maryele who was like the sun and Henrietta who was like the moon at the same time, shifting their gazes repeatedly between the two ladies. But Henrietta did not realize her charm, that was why she thought that way.

Henrietta summarized what she needed to say and began:

"Before saying what we need, I will explain the operating system. If we don't explain the resources we gathered, you might not believe us. This campaign will be led by Shiroe-sama."

Henrietta decided to gamble.

This was not Shiroe's instruction, and was not approved by Maryele. Henrietta did not know what the name Shiroe meant to them, she only knew that he played for a long time, had very deep level of experience, and knew some incredible people. But she did not know why Shiroe was so close to a small guild like Crescent Moon Alliance, and why he was not in any guild.

Henrietta spoke to Shiroe before and thought he was a special player, but was that the truth?

Henrietta heard from Serara about the griffons. From what Henrietta knew, that was not something a normal experienced player will have.

"Black Heart Shiroe is in command?"

The voice was soft, but Michitaka did say these words.

"The power forward is Naotsugu-sama, small forward is Akatsuki-sama, point guard is Nyanta-sama, guard is Maryele and me. There are also other volunteers as well as Crescent Moon Alliance who carry out this campaign."

Henrietta stopped momentarily to peek at Michitaka's reaction.

Michitaka reacted to the name of Shiroe and some others. He suppressed his emotions, so others could not tell what the reaction meant... But he did react.

(Shiroe-sama in control of a big chance of success.)

Shiroe's name had meaning.

"These are the core members, but even so we are still lacking something, so everyone please lend us your aid... We lack funds, we need 5 million gold."

The three of them gasped in unison.

That was quite a large sum of money.

In the game, there were some quests that needed money to complete. Maybe it was needed for bribes in the process, or the fee for training. Some quests required specific items, which you needed to buy from the market. If you took into account all of this, a quarter of the quests required funds.

But 5 million gold was too large a sum of money, it was impossible for a single player quest to request so much cash. But on the other hand, if it were a quest of legendary level, or if it covered a large range of areas, then it was hard to dismiss that you would need such huge funds.

Since no one had heard of this type of quest, did that mean it was a new quest? If it was an unknown quest, it was possible that it was added with the Novasphere Pioneers expansion pack, which no one knew about. But since it was announced that the level cap would be increased, the quest might be targeted at players above level 90.

Or it was a long story quest of a big scale. But if that was so, you would receive some monetary reward as you reached each checkpoint.

This was to motivate the players with rewards as they complete each phase of the quest so they wouldn't give up midway.

... That was what the 3 of them were thinking.

Humans by nature wanted to believe information was real, as Henrietta often heard her father who was a broker, say. The 3 of them were leaning towards believing that this was a new grand-scale mission.

Henrietta asked Maryele to present the goods.

Maryele presented red tea and custard pudding.

"Please have a taste! This is a new product, it is very tasty okay? It's made from a roc egg!"

With Maryele's service with a smile, the 3 of them were stunned by the delicious food and her words. A roc was a high class monster with a level of 85 and above; if you wanted to use its egg... that meant there was someone who was higher than level 90 who had to have created this with a hidden recipe.

"We are not asking for you to sponsor for free. After we complete this campaign, we will share the details of our campaign with you all. In addition, we will also share our current food preparation method, and any recipe we find out in the process of the campaign, using the copying skill of our scribe."

According to what Henrietta and Maryele understood, this campaign was a fight to improve the atmosphere of Akiba, that was to form an independent organization. The two of them did not know the details or the execution method... Shiroe had been vague on this part.

But if it were this type of activity, there was no need to know the information in detail. If it worked, the situation would be transparent, and it had to be this way. Shiroe judged that security could not be maintained with a black box system, and there was no harm in making the information public. And the information would lose its value after the campaign succeeded.

But to the production guilds, if Crescent Moon Alliance was challenging an unknown grand-scale quest, the starting point of the quest, requirements, and how to solve the puzzles were all top secret. Since there was no access to gaming guides via the internet, finding the same quest would take time, maybe even years.

Not only that, since Henrietta said that "our current food preparation method, and any recipe we find out in the process of the campaign", there was a recipe reward, and the quest should be linked with production. From Crescent Moon's activity, this must be a revolutionary recipe. Since the reward was targeted at chefs, but not other production lines, the value was also hard to gauge.

The 3 of them believed the story they deduced.

Henrietta was confident that she has passed the biggest obstacle.

Her terms were so fantastic, they would have to be morons to reject it.

If she were rejected, it meant they still had doubts about the story. But the 3 of them were totally trapped in the "unknown new quest" story they came up with.

(It is about time to throw them life jackets...)

"We have done all we can to raise the money, including clearing our storage bank as well as the profits from Crescent Moon, and we have 0.5 million, but we still need 4.5 million. I feel that just asking for a sponsor from a single guild would upset the current balance. That's why I wish for each guild to come up with 1.5 million... What do you think?"

Henrietta's monetary demand was split in 3.

In this world, level 90 players had wealth between 10,000 to 40 or 50,000. From this estimate, 100 people donating their money would reach the target of 1.5 million.

For the biggest guild, Oceanic Systems, if they asked for donations from all the guild members, everyone just needed to bear the burden of 600 gold.

600 gold was the price of a mid-level armor, their expressions changed into that of determination, which is just as planned.

"The Rodrick Firm will join this campaign."

"8th District Shopping Center agrees as well"

"Understood, Oceanic Systems will also provide monetary support. But we can also be the exclusive sponsor if you wish."

"That is not okay... you want to hog the deal?"

Maryele stopped the commotion and said: "Please don't say that, okay? Please get along well for my sake."

Since Maryele, who had been smiling the whole time said so, the three of them had to give in. The agenda was still controlled by the Crescent Moon Alliance anyway.

"Then the payment time... four days later, is that okay?"

"Understood, what about the recipe in exchange?"

"The food preparation method will depend on how fast our scribe works. But if it is possible, we will provide it on the day of the payment, the latest will be the day after. Shiroe-sama himself is a scribe."

After bidding farewell with these words, the trio left the room. Maryele and Henrietta lost all their willpower and energy. Henrietta felt that the meeting

was moving at her pace and she was controlling its direction, but she still felt more pressure than she expected.

The meeting was short, but the two of them were mentally exhausted. Their backs were so weak that they could not even sit straight, collapsing on the table.

"Henrietta... sorry..."

Maryele said with exhaustion and guilt.

"What's the matter Mary?"

Henrietta's usual high-class lady's tone became lazy.

"I wanted to help, but I didn't do anything, negotiations are hard."

Maryele was embarrassed from the bottom of her heart as she said this. Even though Henrietta was very tired, she still couldn't help laughing out loud.

"Mary, what are you saying? If you did not smile like you did, we will not stand a chance in this meeting."

Henrietta was grateful of Maryele's smile. Without her sunflower-like smile, they probably couldn't secure the funds from the 3 experienced businessmen. And so, Henrietta and Maryele managed to raise the money.

Part 5

The moon was shining brightly tonight.

The heat of the day left behind a dry and warm wind, which blew across the abandoned train station where the fireflies danced. It was situated on the overhead bridge which overlooked the Akiba central square, over 200 meters of concrete ground.

In the real world, this was the platform of the Akiba train station.

The tracks and pillars were completely rusted and covered with weeds and moss. The two towers on either side of the platform had signs of heavy crushing damage, similar to being smashed by a blunt force, causing zigzag edges to form at its peak.

The moonlight made the tower's shadow akin to a spear falling on the platform, mixing with the vegetation and the concrete. Two long shadows stood in this picture.

It was Shiroe and Nyanta.

"The wind is starting to blow nya."

"Yes, it is."

Shiroe raised his hand to his forehead and looked towards the moon.

The wind blew his fringe over his face. He squinted the eyes behind his round glasses and said slowly:

"It's getting late, and it will be some time before Soujirou comes. Chief Nyanta, want to sit down somewhere?"

"No no no, thank you for your concern, but this old man has not become that frail yet nya."

"I am not treating you like an old man."

Shiroe shrugged.

"Shiroe-chi, do you not wish to meet Souji-cchi nya?"

"Ah, eh...."

Shiroe considered the query.

"It's not that I am unwilling, just that I feel a bit guilty. Soujirou invited me when he formed his guild, so it is a bit awkward."

"So that is the case nya."

"He didn't invite Chief Nyanta?"

"During that time, I was online irregularly, so I do not remember his invitation nya."

"I see..."

They were waiting for Soujirou Seta.

He was an old friend of Nyanta, Shiroe, and Naotsugu.

He was in the Debauchery Tea Party as a samurai with subclass sword saint, one of the 8 Debauchery Tea Party members trapped in this world.

In a way, Soujirou was influenced the most by the Debauchery Tea Party. Not only was he earnest and hard-working, he also had a kind nature. When the party disbanded, the one most reluctant to leave was him.

Samurai were proficient in many weapons, but their strength lied in swords. There were a variety of swords, such as the traditional tachi(cavalry sword), the smaller kodachi (a short tachi), or wakizashi (companion sword, a very short back-up blade, could be used for suicide) meant to complement other blades, and their iconic katana weapon. Elder Tales called fierce warriors focusing on damage and strength 'taichi', and those focusing on agility and speed, requiring high level of skill to control were known as 'katana'.

Soujirou was an expert 'katana'

His techniques were not only fast, he could also use graceful movements to hide his actions. You could not see what he is going to do even if you concentrated on him. He was able to parry a punch from giants that could knock down a tree. The armor of sand worms that could withstand blows from warhammers was meaningless before him.

Soujirou always said with a shy smile, "Senpai, there is a trick to this."

When Naotsugu left the game, several others also left Elder Tales due to personal reasons. Chief Nyanta was half-retired for a period of time too, logging in irregularly.

Of those that were still playing Elder Tales, Soujirou was the pseudo-representative. He expressed "I don't want the Debauchery Tea Party's existence to be wasted." and started his own guild.

He also invited the other Debauchery Tea Party members. The Debauchery Tea Party was not a guild, just a name for this group and most of them were not in any guild.

Some of them joined, others declined. Shiroe was in the latter group.

"I feel that there is no need to feel any guilt nya, everyone must walk their own path nya. Souji-cci will not be angry just because of this nya."

"You have a point, but..."

Shiroe stammered.

He was not concerned about declining to join, but the reason behind declining.

He was declining to be bound by these things called guilds.

And yet he now assisted the Crescent Moon Alliance in the Susukino quest, and was frustrated by Akiba bowing to the influence and control of the big guilds. He was meeting with Soujirou of the West Wind Brigade for his help to change this situation. Shiroe was changing with the times.

Back then, he was a neat freak and found guilds and their complicated interpersonal relations to be disgusting, but it was different now. It was just that Shiroe didn't think he could explain exactly what was different, and convey that to Soujirou.

Soujirou formed the West Wind Brigade after losing the Debauchery Tea Party, so he might understand this better than Shiroe.

West Wind Brigade.

Its scale was not big, but it was one of the most influential guilds in Akiba, claiming to have 120 members, but in reality there were less than 60. With these limited numbers, they were able to stand on equal grounds with big guilds like D.D.D, Black Sword Knights, and Honesty.

Although their scale was small, they had been successful in famous raids such as 'Rhadamanthys' Throne' or '9 Prisons of Heroes'. They had consistently raced with other big guilds to be the first to complete raids.

If you considered the results, they probably shone brighter than guilds with plenty of reserves and huge resources.

"Don't worry too much, since you decided to campaign, you have to keep your head up. Shiroe-chi is now the owner of our porch nya."

Nyanta's words made Shiroe change his mindset and think that is really the case.

Just as Soujirou started a place to call his own, Shiroe was also building his new home, and he could not continue to be upset about this.

"Evening Shiro-senpai, Master Nyanta, it's been so long since we last met."

The approaching figure greeted them from a fair distance away. Soujirou's child-like expression reminded Shiroe that Soujirou was younger, and it had been a year since they last met.

"Soujirou, it's been a while."

"Long time no see nya. Souji-cchi, how have you been doing nya?"

Soujirou shrunk his neck shyly from their greeting.

Standing here smiling at each other was like going back to those times.

Soujirou dodged the overhanging vines agilely as he approached, as the fireflies took to the sky.

Soujirou was wearing a hakama with two swords at his waist, like a Bakumatsu (End of Edo period) patriot.

He would wear armor if there were a need to fight, but in the city this was fine.

"I heard you started a guild, how is it nya?"

"Yes, it is doing very well, but the Catastrophe hit soon after."

Soujirou shrugged.

Shiroe noticed something from his expression.

Thinking about it carefully, including himself, Naotsugu, Nyanta, and Soujirou, all of them were not depressed by the Catastrophe. No matter how harsh the situation, they maintained a half-exploring, half-adventuring mood, probably because of the Debauchery Tea Party.

"Are Nazuna-chi and Saki-ojou still with you?"

"Nazuna is with me, Saki is also in my guild... but she wasn't logged in during the Catastrophe."

The two people Nyanta was asking about were the Debauchery Tea Party's excellent healer teammates. This reminded Shiroe the other reason he did not join Soujirou's guild.

"Soujiro is still popular with the ladies?"

"Hmm? Ah... please don't say that."

Soujiro started to panic. Nyanta squinted his thin eyes into a thin line and asked "So nice to be young. How many nya?"

Soujiro raised one hand with his thumb folded in.

(Still in his harem mode, not that I envy him... But there are 4 of them, gives me an unforgivable... sort of feeling. What is this deal with 4 people? Other than Nazuna and Saki, there are 2 more, what a grand formation...)

Shiroe feel exhausted.

"Let's not talk about this. Why did Shiro-senpai contact me so suddenly? I always thought Senpai hated me."

"Ah? Why do you think so?"

These unexpected words made Shiroe reply seriously.

"Nothing really, but, because... I am a harem character."

Soujiro stammered with a red face, making Shiroe speechless. Nyanta laughed heartily at this, if Naotsugu was here he would probably give him a chop immediately as the punchline.

"That is a serious problem, but I won't hate you just because of that, we are Tea Party mates after all!"

"Is that so, you are right... But if that is the case, why are we meeting today?"

Soujiro asked again, Shiroe straightened his back and started over.

"Let's get straight to the point, we need your help."

"How may I assist?"

"... Souji-cchi, how do you feel about the current Akiba nya?"

"This city, what an abstract question... I feel that it is bad in a lot of ways, but for this whole city, I feel that they view the whole world like a prison."

"Prison..."

Soujiroo scratched his head, his samurai-style ponytail flowing with the wind.

"Yes... we have suddenly been taken into an alternate world, with no way of logging out. We cannot die, the world is set like this. There are monsters roaming outside, I can understand the feelings of players who hate fighting. They feel like they're imprisoned."

"That is true nya, you summarized it very well nya."

Nyanta nodded his head in agreement.

Soujiroo put into words the thoughts everyone was thinking. If you saw it this way, there was a feeling of being in an enclosure, Shiroe thought that was only natural.

"Even if I feel bad about it, I feel that it shouldn't be this way. In this type of situation, the weak will be bullied. To be frank, my guild has members who suggesting leaving this city."

"Your guild is leaving Akiba?"

"No, that is only a proposal, there has been no formal discussion yet. The facilities here are more convenient after all. But I cannot bear to watch the city slowly becoming a colder place. It cannot be helped after all."

Soujiroo replied.

Soujiroo's words, 'it cannot be helped', didn't mean he was being irresponsible. He wanted to do something too. But after thinking it through, he judged that there was nothing he could do about it, that's why he concluded it this way.

(The evidence is his depressed tone.)

"There is a way."

"Is that true? Shiro-senpai."

"...It should work."

Shiroe avoided asserting it outright. The things he wanted to do, decided to do, had no guarantees. But if there was anyone who did not have the guts

to follow even though there were no guarantees, the Tea Party would address them as cowards, not companions.

That was why Shiroe would not give guarantees to people he wanted to invite to join his campaign.

"I hope for you to provide some support."

"What do you need me to do?"

"... Not just Soujirou, I also need to borrow the name of West Wind Brigade."

Shiroe looked Soujirou in the eye as he said this.

As Nyanta said, nothing is forever, you had to live life to the fullest. Soujirou who created, and had been protecting the West Wind Brigade, must have put in a lot of love and effort into his guild; you had to look him in the eye if you wanted his help.

For Shiroe who had not built anything, this was even more true.

Soujirou was surprised for a moment, and nodded his head, Shiroe continued:

"First, I hope you can tell everyone that the atmosphere in Akiba is very bad, and it will fall into neglect if we carry on like this. The more big guilds you can spread this to, the better."

"Okay, that is not a problem. But everyone is already aware of this fact, correct?"

"But I feel it is important to actually say it out. You just need to let everyone know that West Wind Brigade harbors such thoughts, and will take action to remedy it, that will be effective enough. There is one other thing: there will be an invitation letter for you a few days from now, so please stay in Akiba until then. It is regarding a meeting. I want to settle some things there."

"Understood."

Soujirou agreed like it was no big deal.

"Is this fine, you won't ask the details of the campaign?"

"Because Shiro-senpai is busy correct? I will delay your progress if I do that. I am a brainless vanguard anyway; even if I listen to the strategist's tactics, I will not be able to understand totally."

These words gave Shiroe a warm feeling as well as fear in his heart.

Shiroe did not expect to be so trusted by Soujiro. They had not met in a year, and he declined his invitation before.

"Souji-cci is a good kid nya."

"I am worthy of Master Nyanta's praise after all."

Soujiro's expression was tense after saying that, and he looked at the two of them straight on.

"I want to talk about something unrelated, Shiro-senpai, Master Nyanta... Will you be willing to join West Wind Brigade? I think Nazuna will be happy too. The members of our guild are nice people. We have been taking turns exploring the regions far away, and we want to gather new information and data. This might not sound right... but this campaign will be more efficient if you use West Wind Brigade's fame, correct? Am I wrong?"

Soujiro's invitation was logical, but Shiroe could not accept this. If it were last week, Shiroe might have agreed, but Shiroe had his own home now.

"You don't like me after all?"

Shiroe shook his head as Soujiro asked with a disheartened tone.

This was the second time Shiroe rejected Soujiro. Shiroe patted his shoulder gently.

Nyanta's words during that time, made Shiroe aware of what he needed to do, and what he had been ignoring.

Indulged in the kindness and tenderness of Naotsugu and Akatsuki, and the protection of Nyanta, the things he did not say until now.

"Soujiro, that is not the case... listen to me, I understood that I need to build my own home. I have been avoiding the troublesome things that happened before and am finally here. But I understand that I need to stand in a position to protect others. That is why I created my own guild, but there

are only a few members, and it is very new. I finally realize the logic that by building a place for others, my home will also be made."

Soujirou looked at Shiroe, as if seeing him for the first time, as Shiroe expressed his determination slowly.

CHAPTER.



KNIGHTS OF CAMELOT

[円卓会議]

► NAME: HENRIETTA

► LEVEL: 90

► RACE: HUMAN

► CLASS: BARD

► HP: 9696

► MP: 9845

► ITEM 1:
[POWDER SNOW BLOUSE]
AN ELEGANT PURE WHITE BLOUSE THAT IS SOFT TO THE TOUCH. PROVIDES COLD RESISTANCE BUT HAS NO PHYSICAL DEFENSE, SO IT IS USED OUT OF COMBAT. ALTHOUGH IT IS THIN, ITS RESISTANCE TO COLD IS HIGH. JUST LIKE ITS COST, THE BUTTONS ARE CRAFTED OUT OF COCOA-COLORED OPALS.

► ITEM 2:
[COMPOSITE BOW]
A MEDIUM-SIZED BOW WITH PULLEYS. ALTHOUGH ITS MECHANISMS ARE MORE COMPLICATED COMPARED TO THE OTHERS, IT HAS HIGH ACCURACY. WHILE THE BOW ITSELF IS PRODUCTION-CLASS, ITS LEVEL IS BETWEEN A MASS-PRODUCED NORMAL ITEM AND AN ARTIFACT-CLASS ITEM. THE VERSATILITY IS HIGH DUE TO THE FACT THAT IT CAN UTILIZE A WIDE VARIETY OF ARROWS.

► ITEM 3:
[AKATSUKI DOLL]
A SCAPEGOAT DOLL GIVEN BY AKATSUKI TO ESCAPE FROM HENRIETTA'S CONSTANT AFFECTION. ALTHOUGH THE ITEM SHOULD NOT HAVE ANY EFFECTS, AKATSUKI SEEMS TO GET CHILLS WHEN THE DOLL'S BODY IS BEING STROKED. DESPITE THE FACT THAT HENRIETTA SAYS THE "THE REAL THING IS CUTER", SHE SEEMS TO LIKE IT VERY MUCH.

<table width=60%><tr><td width=20%; valign="top">Name: Henrietta

Level: 90

Race: Human

Class: Bard

HP: 9696

MP: 9845<td>Equipment:

Snow Dust Blouse
 Pure white blouse that is soft to the touch and can withstand the cold, but not physical attacks, and is treated as casual wear. It feels warm, even though the material is light and thin, which is a reason for its expensive price tag. The buttons are processed Opal, light brown in color.

Composite Bow
 A mid size bow with rollers inside, its structure is more complicated than others, and has a higher accuracy. The bow itself is a production level item, but it can use a large variety of arrows, ranging from mass produced to secret level, so it is a popular product.

Akatsuki Doll
 Akatsuki gave this to Henrietta to escape her relentless affection. Even though it is impossible for it to have any effects, Akatsuki can somehow feel the chill of being touched all over. Even though Henrietta announces 'the real person is cuter', she still loves this very much.

Chapter 04: Knights of Camelot

Part 1

After Crescent Moon opened, Akiba had become more vibrant.

The problem of food looked simple, but that was not true.

The citizens who had so far eaten food like chewing wax were infatuated with Crescent Moon in a blink of an eye. Crescent Moon's meals focused mainly on takeout, and by the real world's standards, it should not be any fancy food, but in this alternate world, it was the best thing ever.

The 3 shops could not meet the demand, but the 4th started operation a few days later. Crescent Moon Alliance's summoner conjured a salamander to heat up the hot plate to keep the pizza slices warm. Custard pudding was made from fresh milk. These two new products received great reviews.

Akiba citizens knew right from the start that Crescent Moon was operated by the small guild Crescent Moon Alliance, and some criticized them for hogging the new recipes. But in the game world, whoever had power was in the right, this concept made everyone accept this fact.

In fact, there were people sending threatening letters to Crescent Moon Alliance demanding them to make the new recipe public, but even the writers knew this was just an excuse.

After the 4th shop opened, a rumor started to spread.

Crescent Moon Alliance might have formed an alliance with the 3 major production guilds, Oceanic Systems, The Rodrick Firm, and 8th District Shopping Center.

The 3 major production guilds had over 5000 members, a third of the total population in Akiba. Some of the ingredients had a high volume of trade in the market, there had been news of 8th District Shopping Center members who were buying them in bulk, as if to confirm this rumor.

Even after expanding to 4 outlets and improving the menu, the increased speed did little to stem the demand. They could serve 1500 people a day at most.

Most of the citizens already had a taste of Crescent Moon's burger, and they wanted to eat it again. Since they could eat the food of the old world again, it was a pain to go back to the days of tasteless moist space food again.

There was already a queue before dawn at Crescent Moon, and queue numbers needed to be issued.

The economic vibrancy caused by Crescent Moon brought other positive effects.

First, Crescent Moon was expensive, a meal was priced 3 to 6 times more than others. In this world without entertainment to spend money on, there were no players who would hesitate in paying this amount of gold. But even so, they still needed a sizable amount of cash on hand. If you ate 3 meals at Crescent Moon a day (If you somehow managed to buy so many!), you would spend 1350 gold a month.

Up until now, life in Akiba didn't require much cash. There were some people who just curled up in a ball in the ruins somewhere, drowning in their sorrow of never returning home. But even players like them were thinking of earning money. This was a major change.

Akiba's central square had not seen people recruiting for raiding partners in a long time. This was unrelated to guilds, just a temporary team of random players going out farming or raiding together. In this world, this was a rare sight, and it garnered more attention than usual.

As they left, Crescent Moon employees in the same area would shout "Bon Voyage!" together and cheer them on.

Of course, these groups would buy a bottle of Black Rose Tea before leaving, maybe they knew the staff personally.

But this had never happened in Elder Tales' new world before, and it was a wonderful and heartwarming scene. The leaving party would have a soothing smile as they began their journey.

Other than personal financial activities, there were also movements in the market. Young deer meat, potatoes, and thunder bird meat; these types of ingredients were beginning to rise in price.

This was the result of the 8th District Shopping Center's discreet buying of stock. But if the price increased, there would be people who react and increase the supply. Several guilds who heard this news organized ingredient transport teams, flooding the market with these ingredients in order to reap the profit.

But the 8th District Shopping Center's Charasin had already anticipated this. He had already arranged with several small guilds he was on good terms with to organize expeditions to farm for the ingredients.

Charasin planned the hunting expedition that would take several days, delegating the responsibility to the local farming team and the transport team. Using the production guild's support system, he set up a supply line.

This went beyond the Catastrophe, or the history of the world when it was a game itself. For the first time ever, a system of 'a production guild directly supporting a battle guild' was formed. The plan was a success, and 8th District Shopping Center did not rely too much on the market for supply, and could retrieve a large amount of ingredients at a fixed price.

The players who had been holing up at home had started to come out, bringing up the purchase of consumables and equipment repair. Blacksmiths had more business, and little by little, Akiba was changing.

Wasn't the source of the change Crescent Moon?

If Crescent Moon Alliance teamed up with the 3 major production guilds, the scale could be as big as one sixth of all players in the Japan server. This would be the birth of the biggest, strongest, and most influential force. The players in other cities had been asking about Crescent Moon Alliance via telepathy, and member application were overwhelming. But Maryele had declined them all by saying 'please wait until the end of the month.'

Battle guilds who usually had no interest in the affairs of production guilds were starting to take notice too.

In this world with no internet or WebTV, which meant no entertainment at all, the joy of living came mostly from gossiping.

Citizens would gather in every corner, discussing news and ideas. The Crescent Moon Alliance came up in the discussion frequently, and the cheerful and kind guild master Maryele, the talented Henrietta, and the young battle team leader Shouryu got mentioned frequently. At the same

time, a part of the more experienced players who knew the details, would mention the names Shiroe, Naotsugu, Nyanta and Debauchery Tea Party as if they were reminiscing.

But it was not only the Adventurers who were gossiping these news, but no one seemed to notice.

Part 2

It had been 10 days since the campaign started.

The Crescent Moons that were full of people everyday, had become a part of the landscape. The long queues were a famous sight. Today the 4 stores were also operating at full speed under the clear summer sky.

But this was a spacious room far from the bustle of the city.

It was the building known as the Heart of Akiba, the large meeting room was on the top floor of the guild building.

This meeting room was open to everyone who had a guild hall. But there was no electricity in this world, so the lift was just a metal box used for decoration. No one was crazy enough to climb 16 levels of stairs.

In the center of this spacious room with a tall ceiling was a round table and the people sitting there were all people that could be seen as representing Akiba.

Black Sword Knights' Grand Commander Isaac.

Honesty's Guildmaster Eins.

D.D.D's Chief 'Berserker' Krusty.

Silver Sword's young leader William.

West Wind Brigade's harem style Guildmaster Soujirou.

Oceanic Systems' 'Strong Armed' Michitaka

The Rodrick Firm's Guildmaster Rodrick.

8th District Shopping Center's young boss Charasin.

Crescent Moon Alliance's Maryele.

Grandeur's Alchemist Woodstock.

Radio Market's expert mechanic Akaneya.

And Shiroe of Log Horizon.

Behind the twelve leaders, they had a few aides with them. The thirty-odd players in this spacious room all had different expressions.

Some felt uneasy, some were surprised, a few were expressionless, and there were those who looked confident. All of them received the invitation to gather here the night before.

The agenda was 'the future of Akiba'.

Hosted by Log Horizon's Shiroe and Crescent Moon Alliance's Maryele together.

Most who were gathered here were leaders of large guilds. Oceanic Systems, The Rodrick Firm, and 8th District Shopping Center were all major production guilds.



Black Sword Knights, Honesty, D.D.D, Silver Sword, and West Wind Brigade were either large-scale or successful battle guilds.

Crescent Moon Alliance, Grandeur, and Radio Market were part of the leading group that failed to form an alliance among the small guilds.

Only Log Horizon was a totally unknown guild.



But the people qualified to gather here had a wide information net, and those who were surprised by Shiroe's presence were less than a quarter.

As the people gathered began gauging each of the participants, Crescent Moon Alliance's Serara came in and served cold fruit tea to everyone. This beverage had not been sold in Crescent Moon yet, surprising all of the participants. But this small sense of shock passed quickly, and the room remained silent.

Shiroe sat calmly.

But his emotions were not calm.

This meeting was Shiroe's battlefield.

He was not losing to a major raid battle, where the fight spread across the arena. Shiroe felt the fever of a heatstroke and the chill of the tense air. The participants were all people he needed to consort with, but only a few were allies he could trust. No matter what happened, he could not let them know how perilous his position was.

(This is a fight I started on my own will.)

Just like Soujirou said, this world was a prison, everyone was bound by the need to survive. The hopelessness of being trapped, the monsters in the wild, and the feeling of helplessness bound them.

Shiroe had been busy with various events since the Catastrophe, dealing with the problems at hand, and increasing the odds of surviving.

But this campaign was different. No matter if it was rescuing Tohya, saving Minori, or building some form of order for Akiba, in the extreme you could say it was just Shiroe's selfish will. This was Shiroe's dream he wanted to fulfill even at the expense of fighting unnecessary battles. Of course Shiroe thought this action was beneficial.

Not only beneficial to himself, but also the people important to him and to the whole Akiba city, Shiroe believed.

Even so, this was still Shiroe's willfulness, this fact could not be changed.

Based on this, Shiroe had found freedom for the first time since the Catastrophe. He used his willfulness as a starting point, started battles for the sake of fulfilling his wish, and gave it his all. This brought a high degree

of tension and pressure that made him weak. But it also brought along a strong sense of joy.

"Shiroe-chi? Are you fine nya?"

Nyanta who was standing behind him asked. Shiroe could accept this concern directly. Including Nyanta and the two not present, Naotsugu and Akatsuki, they had also accepted the Log Horizon label. This was the first challenge of this guild with only four members, and even though they were carrying out different assignments, they had a common battlefield.

To fight and win for your comrades.

Shiroe swore with determination in his heart

The tension increased in the room. Everyone was finally seated.

Shiroe stood up to give the opening speech.

"Thank you everyone for making time from your busy schedules, I am very grateful. My name is Shiroe from Log Horizon... I invited all of you here to discuss an agenda. The content is complicated, and I will need to spend some time on this, so please be patient."

Shiroe paused momentarily, looking around the table.

(...No matter what happens, I am grateful that everyone attended, probably with the help of Soujiro working behind the scenes... But this will save time visiting all the places to convince them. On the other hand, this is the final battle.)

"Keep your speech short, 'Debauchery's' Shiroe, it's not like we don't know each other."

The one speaking was 'Black Sword' Isaac, one of the top few players in the Japan server. He had experienced hundred of battles, leading the way as the vanguard in various major raids. Shiroe was invited to lend his support several times too. Shiroe thought he wouldn't remember a player with such an unpopular class as enchanter, but it seemed that was not true.

"What is the purpose of this meeting?"

The one commenting impatiently was Silver Sword's young leader William. This youth had a head of long silky white hair tied behind him. He had the appearance of an elf prince. He kept crossing his legs alternately, and seemed to have little patience.

"Since someone wants to speed it up, let's go directly into the main topic. Should I say question or proposal? I want to discuss the current situation in Akiba. As everyone knows, we are stuck in this alternate world since the Catastrophe, with no way to log out, and no clue on what to do. This is something we have to live with. On the other hand, the atmosphere in Akiba is deteriorating, a lot of our friends are losing their drive, and even giving up on life. The economy is poor, and exploration efficiency is not improving. I want to settle this situation, that is the reason why we are here."

Shiroe said with his eyes half open.

No problem, the words he needed to say flowed in his mind. It was so clear that he could almost touch them.

"And we are here to do what?"

"So troublesome..."

"Why do we need to discuss this sort of thing?"

"I understand what you mean, but what can we do?"

Calming down the chatter in the room, Honesty's young guild master Eins asked.

"Something like the small guild alliance?"

"Sort of, but I heard that the plan was a failure."

Shiroe swept his gaze towards the plan's initiators, Grandeur's and Radio Market's guild representatives, who nodded their pale faces in agreement. They... including Crescent Moon Alliance, were all small guilds, and they did not seem qualified to sit here with their small scale operation. There were plenty of guilds that had fifty-fold their membership.

"That plan has been dissolved, but I feel it is because we were pushing too hard on a lot of issues. The plan back then was to unite the small guilds to

compete against the major guilds... In other words, the small guilds allying together to protect our common interest. That's why our plan failed."

"Yes, we agreed to work together on the surface, but we ended up pursuing our own agendas in the end, so there was no unity and the plan broke down."

The master of the making of watches and fine devices, the high level subclass mechanic, Radio Market's Akaneya chipped in on Maryele's speech.

"So you want to gather all the... or at least the guilds that can represent Akiba's influence to readjust our relations in the city?"

"... small guilds cannot ally together, even more so if they affect the power balance of the major guilds, this is madness!"

The people present started reacting to Maryele's speech.

The invitation included Maryele's guild as the host, this made the participants think that 'In other words, this is the follow up of the failed small guild alliance?'

(This is the natural conclusion...)

Even if some people knew about Shiroe, it was hard to gather everyone for this meeting by using his name.

Maryele's fame, in addition to the fact that Crescent Moon Alliance equated to Crescent Moon, the weight of these two names had somehow managed to get the meeting underway. But they needed to clear this misunderstanding soon.

"The agenda is not the same. It is the improvement of the situation in Akiba."

Shiroe's words were interrupted by the sound of a chair moving.

"If that is the case, please allow us to leave first."

The one standing up was the one who had been unhappy and impatient all this while, Silver Sword's Guildmaster William. He adjusted his dagger on his waist and put on his cape.

"We are a battle guild. The atmosphere in Akiba has nothing to do with us. In other words, we are fine with the city being in chaos or in harmony. The affairs of the city should be left to those who are interested. It is probably a waste of time, but we don't think this is a bad thing. We are just simply not keen to take part, so count us out."

William left after saying his piece.

A wave of commotion started in the room.

Grandeur's, Radio Market's, and Crescent Moon Alliance's leaders all had sour faces. Shiroe heard that the small guild alliance had lots of guilds withdrawing like this in the latter phase.

But Shiroe who was chairing the meeting had already expected this to happen.

(Silver Sword withdrew...)

Shiroe analyzed the effect of this incident on the battle and adjusted the scorecard in his heart.

Silver Sword was indeed a big-scale battle guild, but their presence was not crucial here. If the biggest battle guild, D.D.D, and the biggest production guild, Oceanic Systems wanted to withdraw, Shiroe already had a plan in place to convince them to stay. But Shiroe had already planned for 1 or 2 guilds to withdraw.

More importantly, the atmosphere in the room was getting rowdy after William and his guild members left. This could not be ignored.

"Even though there are now 11 of us left, let me continue. As Silver Sword's guildmaster mentioned, the reason for inviting all of you was to form an organization known as the 'Round Table Alliance' to discuss the operation of Akiba as a city. There are two major goals. The first is improving the atmosphere of Akiba, to guide the citizens to revive their vigor. The next is the improvement in security. I hope the organization can operate with these two goals in mind, and slowly become the tool that can solve the problems in the function of the city."

The room was silent once again.

This is because the participants were probing each other for any reaction.

(This is the main event.)

Shiroe felt himself finally reaching the starting line as he looked around the room.

The people gathered here were able to influence 80% of the city; just their members alone totaled 6000, 40% of the population.

Not only that, but since there were so many strong guilds, they should have guilds they were on good terms with, or even formed subordinate-like relationships under them. Raw material exchanges or banding together for raids, these type of horizontal relations spread their network even further.

Those gathered here had a big influence over all the Adventurers in Akiba. Their consensus was almost equal to the consensus of all citizens. This was why Shiroe chose these influential guilds in the first place.

But getting the major guilds to agree was difficult. It was several times harder than "destroying a guild". Shiroe understood, but still made this challenge.

"Before that, can you explain the criteria of choosing the members?"

The first to break the silence was Eins, the guildmaster of Honesty. He asked with a middle-aged voice similar to his appearance.

"I understand. Firstly, Black Sword Knights, Honesty, D.D.D, and West Wind Brigade are either major battle guilds, or successful ones. Silver Sword who withdrew is no exception. Oceanic Systems, The Rodrick Firm, and 8th District Shopping Center represent the 3 big productions guilds. Crescent Moon Alliance, Grandeur, and Radio Market represent the small guilds. These are the reasons why I chose everyone here to participate. But this is something I don't want you all to misunderstand. The 3 small guilds are representing not just themselves, but also all the small guilds that do not have the chance to take part. They are here to reflect the views of all these guilds and people. Even the smallest guild should have a chance to express their views. If we succeed in forming the organization, I hope these 3 guilds will uphold this standpoint."

Shiroe was expecting some objection to the small guilds taking up 3 seats, but unexpectedly, everyone calmly accepted it.

The major guilds that are invited here had numbers over 6000, but on the contrary, this meant that people who did not join these guilds was over 9000, Shiroe inviting 3 guilds to represent them was acceptable to the participants.

But maybe they are just assuming the organization wouldn't be formed in the first place, so they didn't really care, that was what Shiroe observed.

"What about you?"

The short question was asked by the leader of D.D.D, 'Berserker' Krusty. He looked different than his nickname with his glasses and handsome face.

"I am taking part as the organizer composer."

Shiroe reply curtly.

Shiroe was chairing this Akiba self-governance meeting, but since the criteria of taking part was the guild's scale of operation and fame, Shiroe was not qualified.

Formed only last week with only 4 members, even calling it a small guild sounded too much, it was a super-mini guild. A new guild like this wouldn't be heeded even if he talked about Akiba's future.

From Shiroe's own criteria, he should be disqualified.

(But, this is not important.)

If you wanted to talk about qualification, it did not meet the standard. But the big guilds that did qualify, were they improving the city? If we asked them if they had done anything for the masses, the answer would be no.

(Things will not progress as I wish no matter how much we wait, this has been confirmed... If you want to say this is arrogance, you will not be wrong. This is my willfulness, but I won't be humble, I will give it my all... I have completed the preparations in advance, and I have started this meeting.)

"Erm... In other words, you organized this meeting and sent out the invitation to qualify for this discussion?"

Krusty made this query as he noticed Shiroe's intent, and Shiroe said confidently, "That is correct."

"Assuming we create the organization, how are we going to maintain security? No, firstly what do you mean by the 'deteriorating security'?"

'Black Sword' Isaac asked, making Shiroe tense up.

"Some guilds have confined beginners in the name of 'protection', this is a common knowledge correct? This is not a healthy situation."

Shiroe pointing out this fact made Isaac back off.

"...is it regarding 'EXP Pot'? But that is not illegal correct?"

The term 'EXP Pot' caused a commotion, half the participants reacted with 'ah ah, he is bringing this up as expected.' Setting whether it was legal to one side, they still felt guilty about this fact.

"Players do not have any laws to follow, breaking non-existing laws is just an excuse, everyone here understands this point."

Shiroe said to Isaac who had a sinister expression.

"This is not limited to just the 'EXP Pot' incident, the problem is that the players have no legal guidelines to refer to, so we can do as we wish in this world correct? But even so, to us it is not about the legal aspect, the important thing is we don't feel guilt over this."

"You are being illogical, the law does exist. If players fight in a non-combat zone, they will be killed as punishment."

"This is the result, not the law. This is just a simple matter of cause and effect. To clarify, players fighting in a non-combat zone is the cause, the guards attacking is the effect. This is not a rule, but a natural phenomenon. We did not agree to this, and we did not set this standard, this type of thing is not under a legal system."

Shiroe silenced Isaac with his words.

Black Sword Knights was one of the big guilds that was allegedly buying EXP Pots. Isaac was trying to wipe away his guilty conscience with this argument.

But this was one of the obstacles in Shiroe's way, he had to do all he could to remove it.

"For example, when I went to Susukino, there is a guild Brigandia abducting young NPCs and selling them to players as slaves, doing this kind of shady business."

The participants all looked at Shiroe with shock.

"Based on your concept, this is not illegal, because the guards did not attack them. But that is not what the law is about right? This action can be done in this world, it is possible. But a legal system is different, the question is 'Is this acceptable to us', that's how the law should be like, correct? We need rules to govern ourselves."

You could make as many excuses as you wanted.

For instance, confining the beginners was for their protection. Taking the 'EXP Pot' was to make up for their lack of combat ability to make money, so they needed this to offset their living expenses.

The selling of NPCs as slaves could be waived off with the excuse 'they are slaves and have no human rights'. Nobody could prove they were human, so they had no rights. And rights were not something you get just because you proved something. It's something you earned after winning fights. The history of the real world had already proven this point.

That's why Shiroe's tactical goal was not to use logic to break all these excuses, but to make them realize 'we need to regulate ourselves in this lawless world.'

The point Shiroe raised made everyone start to talk among themselves. Some expressed their views in a loud voice, not just the guild representatives, but their aides as well, making the room noisy.

There were two types of reactions.

One thought that there needed to be some ground rules.

The other thought there was no way they could come to a consensus.

"Silver Sword declared they are withdrawing, but they seem to be in favor of the meeting carrying on. Assuming an influential group appearing in Akiba who does not agree with the existence of this organization, what

should be done? In other words, there may be others who oppose the consensus of this organization."

Krusty asked Shiroe calmly as if he were representing all those present.

"That is to fight, basically chase them out of Akiba. Even if they sneak in, it will be hard to perform any activities. We can also consider forcing their guild to disband."

Shiroe's answer caused an uproar.

Similar to the sound made in the Crescent Moon Alliance meeting room by Maryele, Henrietta, and Shouryuu 2 weeks ago. "Disband guild", "Force them out".

Talk was easy, execution was difficult. In this world where you could respawn, even death was not a deterrent. Since it was not a deterrent, the effect of arrest was also low. Taking this to the extreme, even if you were arrested and detained in jail, you could escape by suicide.

With these conditions, destroying guilds was very difficult.

But the reason behind the air of panic in this silent room was not the same as the helplessness they felt in 2 weeks ago. The group here had influence over 80% of the citizens.

If the participants came into consensus, the things Crescent Moon Alliance could not achieve could be done here, such as guarding all the entrances, executing any wanted person by PK. The production guilds could refuse all trade with criminals.

Doing this would use up a lot of resources and manpower, but was able to pressure the populace in both physical and non-physical ways.

"But you will need the help of battle guilds like us to achieve this, correct?"

'Black Sword' Isaac reminded Shiroe.

"In the end, if it is 10 or 20 people, we can perform this type of punishment. But assuming if one of the major guild here opposes this and ignores the decision of the council and announce that the law can go and eat shit... that will be war then? Even if the organization is formed, there is no guarantee every issue will be settled smoothly, I want to know if there is a

way to integrate all our views? If someone objects and causes a war, won't this meeting be pointless?"

Isaac had a point.

The participants agreed softly, and the sound of chatter spread through the room.

For example, if his Black Sword Knights revolted, it would be hard to suppress the hundred and ninety level 90 players in his guild. Because the city prohibited combat, they had to arrest or PK them in other zones. Even if they succeeded, they would not be able to deal the killing blow to the guild.

Using economic sanctions was not effective if a guild grew beyond a certain size. For guilds with enough members, they would be bound to have production subclass members among them, and they would be able to self-sustain.

The situation would be based on the members' subclass levels, but if there were more than 50 members, they would be able to form an independent community.

Taking this point into consideration, even if Shiroe's suggestion succeeded, and the big guild was able to bully the council to support their agendas, then it would be the same as the current situation.

Shiroe lowered his gaze, and adjusted his glasses.

(It has been going just as planned. Normally that would be the case, even if the council is formed, what follows will be settling the infighting and disputes... But it won't be like this.)

"Your proposal can only be described as impractical, correct?"

Krusty asked as usual with his chiseled handsome face. It was hard to imagine that this intelligent-looking young man was the 'Berserker' everyone feared. But that was the truth, which he supported with more evidence calmly.

"I think there is merit to forming this organization but... if it will be hollow like this, I don't think it can have any practical effect in binding the people to follow the law as intended."

The criticism made Shiroe raise his hand.

Everyone was intimidated by the atmosphere, and focused their eyes on Shiroe's action. The meeting fell into silence immediately.

"Today... about 4 hours ago, I purchased the 'guild building' zone."

Among the participants, there was a feeling they had been shot with an arrow.

Everyone took a bit of time to understand what his words meant.

"I have the authority to change the settings of the zone, including who can enter the zone... In simple terms, I can blacklist anyone and ban them from using the guild building. This means they cannot use their guild hall, the bank, and the warehouse."

Everyone had the expression as if they were choking on something as they stared at Shiroe. Only Henrietta let out a sigh. In this spacious meeting room, only she had seen through Shiroe's intent. When Shiroe heard her sigh, he let out a sheepish smile momentarily.

"See, it's so black that it shines."

Henrietta seemed to say with a tone of both sympathy and the feeling that it could not be helped. This made Maryele who was holding her breath nod in agreement. Shiroe's words sounded like a death sentence.

Part 3

After waking up in the morning, she used the water in the bucket to wash her face.

This shabby bucket was meant to be used in stables to store hay. Minori used the cold water from the dirty bucket to wash her face, and wrapped her dirty cloak around her.

This was one of the rooms in the Hamelin guild hall used to let the beginners sleep. There were only simple furniture and minimal facilities inside.

(I need to go to the kitchen...)

The time for morning preparation was very tight, everybody started to move, doing the jobs they had been forced to perform. Minori was in charge of distributing breakfast, she had to collect the food from the kitchen.

Minori prayed that nothing would happen today.

Today was a special day.

Minori hastily tidied her dress and headed to the kitchen.

Comrades with the chef subclass definitely woke earlier to prepare for making bread. Minori didn't think this was coarse food. No matter how high-class the meal looked, they all tasted the same. Putting it another way, even bread with water was a sumptuous meal, Minori had warned herself for the past two months.

Minori greeted the chef softly and took out a large tray hastily. Apart from the beginners, there was a guard posted to watch them here. Minori tried her best not to meet his gaze and hurriedly filled the flask with well water.

A total of 35 sets, Minori placed the bread and water on the wooden tray.

"Stop."

The man's voice made Minori shrink her body in reflex.

She felt cold sweat coming out of her palms.

(Why... I didn't do anything, this was just as usual...)

Today needed to be the same as always, but something just had to happen so early in the morning.

"Eh, yes."

Minori squeezed out a reply, even she felt that it was soft like the hum of a mosquito, and could not be heard.

"Ha, just look at your smelly face... What is it? Don't you know how to greet others properly?"

"Yes... good morning."

The guild member on guard duty corrected her as he snorted.

Minori suppressed her emotions and greeted him.

"Nevermind... You are a tailor right? What level?"

"Level 31."

"That means you can sew level 30 leather armor, help me make a leather apron and gloves today as your training."

"I understand."

Minori bowed repeatedly and left the kitchen, her heart pumping so fast like it was going to break down.

After that night, Shiroe and Minori communicated several times.

Every time was after the sun had set, when the night was young and the guild was quiet.

Minori laid down on the ice-cold concrete wrapped in her cloak and waited. A ring tone only she could hear sounded in her ear, this signaled Shiroe calling by telepathy.

In the sleeping room of Hamelin, late in the night when all was quiet, it was hard to hold a conversation, she had to cough and knock the floor softly as signals. Only when there were no guards could she put in a few short sentences. In order to not let her voice sound choked which was embarrassing, she could only speak in a whimsical voice.

Shiroe's content was usually normal daily stuff.

Once or twice a day, and the duration was only about 10 minutes.

For example where he went and who he met, the topics were like this.

Shiroe seemed to have comrades now, Naotsugu who liked to make weird jokes was a guardian. The short lady with a cruel and sharp tongue was an assassin, and the one Shiroe addressed as Chief, the mature

swashbuckler Nyanta. Other than this, she also heard about the Crescent Moon Alliance's Maryele, Henrietta and Shouryuu.

Shiroe described what he had achieved and his ongoing plan. To put it concisely, she could catch a glimpse of Shiroe's world.

(Shiroe-san and I are in the same world... We are in the same world, but this world is tired and dirty to me, .. but pretty and wide to Shiroe-san.)

Minori felt a pang of sadness.

She didn't feel it was unfair, seeing the world to be shabby was because her eyes and soul had been covered in shadows.

Shiroe's side was full of cheerful and kind people, but not for her. Minori understood her heart felt jealousy. Shiroe's world was bright and wide, but her world was dirty and cold. In other words, it was like the filth in her heart had spread to the outside, thinking about this made her sad.

Shiroe described slowly and calmly.

He had not joined any guilds before.

Roaming around the place like a mercenary who offered help.

Even if he made progress, he would destroy the relations himself, never thinking of building anything. Even so, he was determined to build his own home. Even now he had jitters, afraid of working with others, afraid of asking for others, inviting others.

But from Minori's view, this was not Shiroe troubling others, he was just worrying about nothing.

Because he treated Minori and Tohya kindly before. To Shiroe, this may be a kindness not worth mentioning, but this kindness was still helping them even now.

Shiroe's world was won through his battles. If she could not have the world Shiroe had, it meant she was not qualified.

Minori probably lost her chance the first few days after the Catastrophe.

(After the Catastrophe, I was just hoping to be saved and was crying the whole time, that's why I lost...)

Minori thought with a bitter and tortured feeling. Joining Hamelin was the same, she was hoping to be rescued, she didn't want to do anything by herself, only focusing on others to save her, that's why she lost everything. The chance Shiroe and Minori received equally was used effectively by Shiroe, but squandered by Minori.

Because of this, her current situation was not unfair.

Minori didn't have the bright things Shiroe had, but it was totally not his fault.

(If I have any thoughts of blaming him, I will really be...not worthy to talk to Shiroe-san.)

Shiroe had taken steps to build his own home, so Minori could do that too... Maybe she had lost all her fortune, but she was a beginner anyway, so she didn't have much wealth in the first place.

(I have Tohya, my most important family.)

Even when she was scared and lonely on the streets, and could only hide in the dark corners of ruins to live, that was definitely better than here. If she had this kind of resolve after the Catastrophe, she wouldn't be in this position.

Minori cheered herself up, and headed to the room for the beginners.

Shiroe was really executing the plan to rescue Minori and the others, and deducing from what Shiroe had said, not only Minori, but all the beginners in Hamelin would be rescued in this operation.

(Shiroe-san is amazing... calm, mature, cool, knowledgeable, tall, and gentle...)

Minori felt her thoughts going into a loop, her face became hot and red.

Someone like him was coming to rescue her.

Shiroe thought of Minori as a friend worth helping.

Minori didn't believe she had such value, concluding that Shiroe was just kind by nature, that's why he felt responsible for the twins he had spent such a short time with.

But Tohya was the same, he said before that 'Niichan is so cool', and after a long pause, he continued: "... Can I be like him?"

Tohya was a brother Minori was proud of.

Since Tohya felt this way, Minori must be like this too. Minori must prove to Shiroe that 'helping her was not the wrong decision.' If she didn't do this in the future, Minori would not be qualified for Shiroe to talk to her anymore.

For this, her heart was set on deleting any thoughts of 'unfair'.

You could be envious, and could feel sad because of envy.

But if this pain could become the force to push her onward, Minori would welcome it with open hands. But she would not have time to entertain negative thoughts about 'unfair'.

Minori distributed the bread to the others, then moved to her usual west corner of the room, taking small bites from the bread. The bread was bad, but it was not disgustingly bad. She swallowed mouthful by mouthful the dull and uninteresting food, and waited with bated breath.

There were no mid-level guild members in the room.

The beginners who had gathered around stole glances at Minori. Minori nodded to acknowledge them, and encouraged them softly.

Shiroe's lessons were mostly related to the basic functions of Elder Tales. It was very basic knowledge, but in this world with no internet access, the knowledge and the tips became a huge advantage for Minori and Tohya. Not limited to class or subclass this common and basic knowledge separated them from the normal beginners.

The two of them used this knowledge to settle the unreasonable demands of Hamelin the best they could. This attitude had earned the trust of the other beginners over time.

Minori took some warm water for her comrade that was not feeling well. As she handed it over, she continued to think.

Shiroe said he would make contact today, and to take action immediately after that.

She had already mentioned it to her comrades, Tohya definitely knew that they needed to act today.

Even though she didn't know when the message would come, Minori predicted that it would either be at dawn or at night. Tohya would be going out to farm during the day, if the rescue subjects were separated, it would be hard to execute.

After finishing the bread, the farmers moved under Tohya's lead to the other room to prepare. The beginners involved would be ordered to gather, confirm the farming location, party members, and assignment. The appointed party members would check and put on their equipment and then head out.

At this moment, a ringtone sounded in Minori's ear.

(He's coming... it is Shiroe-san!)

Her heart beat like a fire alarm bell, from the tense feeling of the coming commotion. Even if her brain knew she wouldn't die even if she was killed, she would still be afraid when a weapon was pointed at her.

Minori knew what kind of battle plan would come next, but it might become violent, and there was a high chance it would turn into a battle. But Minori had already considered that might happen, and was determined not to show her shameful side.

After the telepathy connected, the voice only Minori could hear said,

"Morning.... Minori? Time is of the essence, we will begin the operation now, the signal is the same as usual... Are you in the room you usually sleep in?"

Cough. Minori coughed once to convey the word yes.

"Tohya is in the other room preparing?"

Yes again.

"Understood. Later when the time comes for Tohya to leave, exit the guild hall together. Same for all the beginners, just walking out the door will do. Don't worry, we have control over the guild building."

(Control?)

Minori did not understand what he meant, just replied with a yes.

"Also, if there is any incident inside, and you respawn after being defeated, just run to the guild building from the cathedral. The guild building's lobby is the HQ of this rescue operation."

Minori concentrated hard to remember these instructions.

"I am having another important battle at the same time, so I won't be there. This operation will be commanded by a child named Shouryuu. Also, another assassin named Akatsuki can be trusted. She will be at the lobby or nearby."

Minori was so nervous that her legs felt weak and her chest hurt. But she worked hard to control herself, and acknowledged softly.

"Naotsugu will be at the cathedral, if the worst happens you can depend on him. Let's begin... Operation Escape."

Part 4

Tohya received the same telepathic message.

(Niichan, the battle begins.)

Tohya swallowed, his hands that were adorning his armor transmitted the sensation of nervousness. He breathed slowly and moved his gaze. It was still too early to inform his comrades.

Shiroe's instructions were to lead all the beginners and escape to the guild building. Tohya and the others were in the Hamelin guild hall, just a door separated them from freedom.

If everyone got through this door, then they would complete Shiroe's goal. If it was just him alone, Tohya was confident he could escape in 10 seconds.

But Minori wouldn't do that.

Minori would leave only after confirming Tohya had left. No, big sister Minori would be the rear guard, would only leave after everybody else had gone.

(Since that is the case, I cannot leave first either.)

He knew his elder sister's - Minori's nature tended towards self-reproach.

This was the negative side of being responsible, and Tohya felt this sense of responsibility came about because of him.

Tohya liked his sister.

Classmates had said that a brother and sister's relationship was one with lots of conflicts. Some habits or thoughts were tolerable if it were others, but if it was someone living under the same roof, it would create pressure. Tohya remembered thinking that this concept made sense.

But from Tohya's point of view, this pressure came from seniority relations, normal siblings had an age difference, their difference in abilities could not be overlooked.

In the elder sibling's eyes, a younger sibling was like an untalented version of themselves. For the younger ones, the elder siblings were tyrants.

That's why there was pressure living together.

But this was more relaxed for twins. Minori was the elder, so she would take care of him in all manners. But their time of birth differed by only a few hours, Tohya wouldn't view her as his protector.

But treated her as his family, loved her like his partner.

Because they were twins, they coordinated with each other well when playing or quarreling. Normal siblings had an age gap, but they had no such experience with seniority, Tohya thought they were very fortunate.

But even if their age was the same, his sister was more timid when it comes to relationships. Tohya was a boy, so he needed to protect his sister. Tohya had always thought of this as his duty.

"Hey, time to move out, I will report to the guildmaster. You guys go and fall-in in front of the guild building."

The one issuing the order was the farming leader, the proud summoner. He left the room after saying that, probably to the guildmaster's room.

Tohya secured his cheap taichi to his waist, faced the door, and said to his comrades behind him,

"The help that I mentioned before is coming... Move to the guild building lobby now, hurry."

A choking sound came from behind, everyone should have sensed the situation and started moving in a hurry. Someone wanted to bring his stuff along, but was stopped by the words 'don't bother with that, we got nothing valuable anyway'.

Yes, Tohya said they didn't have anything that could be described as wealth. The most he had was the cheap Bag of Holding that ignored the weight of items, and the clothes and junk inside.

Tohya put his ear on the door and looked behind him. Several comrades nodded in reply. Tohya opened the door that led to the corridor of the guild hall, and headed straight to the other beginners' room.

Tohya walked to the door, and heard a scream and the sound of a collision. Tohya opened the door without hesitation, and he saw Minori struggling with a mid-level guild member.

(They found us out?)

Tohya breathed lightly, and headed to the girls who were watching the two struggling in fear, signalling them to leave, and slamming into the short-haired bandit that was pushing his sister down.

"Eh, what are you up to!"

A sound of a man sucking in a big breath. That should be the the bandit preparing to bellow loudly. Sister gave a fearful expression, just seeing her face made Tohya move his body unconsciously.

Lowering his center of gravity, his left hand turning smoothly. Instead of pulling the sword out, it was more like the taichi flew from its sheath. The bright silver light turned into a line, going straight for the target's throat. This was the samurai's skill 'Lanius Capture'.

The effect of the skill was destroying the opponent's voice box preventing the chanting of magic. The short-haired bandit under this effect was not

planning to cast any spells, but the effect still worked, as he put his hands to his throat and coughed.

Guild halls were normally a non-combat zone. If you performed battle actions, even if you were alone, NPC guards would teleport in immediately.

But the non-combat zone setting could be toggled by the owner. Hamelin had set the zone to allow for battles in order to 'manage' the beginners.

Mid-level members used this setting to torture the beginners.

...at least until today.

"Take everyone and go!"

Tohya's voice made Minori stand up and lead her female comrades to the entrance of the guild hall. There was no time to waste, she could only cheer them on and guide them.

On the other hand, Tohya was facing off with the mid-level bandit.

He had a rough face and eyes burning with hatred. The beginner he looked down on made him lose his voice, spurring his wrath. Tohya and him had a difference of 20 levels.

The bandit drew out a curved knife that was 50cm long from his waist and slashed at Tohya. 'Lanius Capture' could only remove the ability of chanting spells and talking, which was a threat to sorcerers and healers. But it could not seal the combat ability of a melee character like him.

The bandit's knife was sharp, breaking through Tohya's defenses easily and cut his body. The difference in ability between the two of them was too big.

Tohya's surprise attack worked because of two reasons. The first one was the arrogance of the opponent who was careless in thinking that the beginners would not revolt. The 2nd was that Tohya used 'Lanius Capture'.

Samurai's skills had long cool down times, most of them could only be used once every 5 to 10 minutes, they were single-use skills. But in contrast, all the skills were set to be very strong and accurate. This special trait meant that the skill was effective even on a player who was 20 levels higher.

The moves were strong and had many varieties, but convenient mid-level skills to tide over the cool down time were few in number, that was the samurai's characteristic.

"Lanius Capture" lasted for 15 seconds.

There were less than 10 seconds left, Tohya suppressed his panicking emotions, as he tanked the bandit's attack.

(No need to win, just hold on until everyone escapes!)

Blood mist sprayed all around him, which obviously came from Tohya's body. The pain was hard to bear, almost to the point of numbness. He could feel his limbs turning cold and heavy.

"Tohya!"

The bandit's attack was suddenly blocked by a barrier that looked like a mirror. The mirror could not withstand the attacks of the higher level bandit and was starting to crumble. This was Minori's 'Damage Prevention' magic. Tohya could see the bandit sneer in rage.

"Everyone is at the entrance, let's go to the corridor!"

"Okay, go!"

Tohya waved his blade in a wide arc to stop the bandit and followed Minori, leaving the beginner's room for the corridor that was less than 2 meters wide. He could protect Minori here, preventing them from flanking from the side or back.

"Cough, kah ah!"

But the 'Lanius Capture' skill lost its effect at this moment, he held his throat, coughed hoarsely and shouted,

"Do you know what is the consequence of this! Damn brats, I will kill you at least a hundred times!"

Just as the twins feared, this roar could be heard throughout the guild hall. Several doors opened along the corridor, with Hamelin's core members appearing hastily with their weapons.

The guildmaster with sunken eyes, the frustrated summoner, and the production-based man who looked at the beginners with disdainful eyes.

They shouted threateningly in the same way and drew their weapons.

"What are the two of you doing?"

The summoner waved his hands widely, and a black wind appeared. The flying mob of insects which were as small as ants was the 'Deadly Bug Squall', an attack spell that had the effect of obscuring your field of vision. It bypassed Tohya and went straight towards Minori. Minori chanted 'Damage Prevention' spells with all her might, but the level difference was too great, the relentless wave of black bugs was slowly breaking the shining barrier, which shattered like glass.

(Even in a narrow corridor, I cannot stop magic from directly attacking my back line, I am so stupid!)

Tohya blamed himself. He slashed at the black fog of bugs. What Tohya saw was the sorcerer behind the fog waving his wand.

"Tohya, Tohya!"

"Minori, just a bit more! Keep your head down!"

Tohya hugged his sister with his bruised hand from the attacks and ran into the door which connected the two zones.

CHAPTER.

2

GRAB YOUR FUTURE
[その手につかみ取れ]



► NAME: MICHITAKA

► LEVEL: 40

► RACE: HUMAN

► CLASS: MONK

► HP: 15149

► MP: 4453

► ITEM 1:
[RAGING EARTH HAMMER]
ARTIFACT-CLASS ITEM.
REWARD FROM A 5-ROUND
CHALLENGE AGAINST
A <CYCLOPS> FOR A
BLACKSMITH QUEST.
CAN BE USED AS A
WEAPON, BUT IF USED
AS A BLACKSMITHING
TOOL THE DURABILITY
OF ITEMS YOU
CREATE ARE
INCREASED.

► ITEM 2:
[CRAFTSMAN'S APRON]
ARMOR FOR BLACKSMITHS.
IT IS OF LITTLE USE IN
COMBAT, BUT IT INCREASES
THE ATTRIBUTE VALUE
BONUS AND HP BONUS
OF ITEMS YOU CREATE,
WHICH IS AN EXCELLENT
ABILITY. HOWEVER,
BECAUSE IT IS ONLY
UPPER BODY ARMOR,
CARE MUST BE TAKEN
WHEN YOU'RE WEARING IT.

► ITEM 3:
[BLACKSMITH'S SEVEN TOOLS]
A CRUCIAL ITEM FOR A
BLACKSMITH'S PRODUCTION.
IT IS AN ESSENTIAL ITEM
FOR ALL BLACKSMITHS,
AND NEEDED ACROSS
ALL LEVELS. THE THINGS
IN THE TOOLBOX
VARIES BY EACH
ADVENTURER.

<table width=60%><tr><td width=20%; valign="top">Name: Michitaka

Level: 90

Race: Human

Class: Monk

HP: 15142

MP: 4453<td>Equipment

Armageddon Hammer

A reward for completing five smithing challenges against a Cyclops, 'secret treasure' level. Can be used as a weapon, but has the effect of increasing durability of produced equipment, an excellent tool.

Artisan Apron

Armor that can be equipped by blacksmiths, not effective in battles. It has the excellent effect of increasing the stats and HP-added for equipment produced. This is an upper body armor, take extra care when equipping.

Blacksmith's Toolbox

A crucial tool for forging items, indispensable for all blacksmiths. It can be equipped at any level, some adventurers will customize their own toolbox.

Chapter 05: Grab Your Future

Part 1

"You are threatening us!"

In another location, in the spacious meeting room on the top floor of the guild building, the meeting was heading towards a flash point.

The announcement that Shiroe 'owns this guild building' had the same effect as an explosion.

The only ones who did not feel the blow were Shiroe himself, Nyanta behind him, the Crescent Moon Alliance members, and Soujirou of West Wind Brigade who did not know the actual plan but had somehow sensed the situation.

The guild building was one of the main facilities of Akiba.

The guild hall's main functions included the forming, joining, withdrawing from guilds, as well as dissemination of special events for high-level guilds. It administrated everything in regards to guilds in the system.

But it did more than that. The guild building lobby in Akiba also housed the bank counters. Banks in Elder Tales were important facilities, where you could deposit your money and rent warehouse space to store your items.

In this alternate world, the only penalty for death was the deduction of some experience points and a drop in the durability of your equipment. But items not equipped would be dropped on the field with a certain probability.

If you were lucky you might be able to recover them. But if you were PKed, it would definitely be taken by the enemy. Even discounting this reason, having a large amount of cash on your person was a reckless act. Players would normally deposit most of their wealth in the bank. When they needed to spend it on expensive items, they could pay a processing fee to remit the money.

For Elder Tales players, the bank was something you used everyday, an important and convenient facility.

Akiba's only bank counter was in the guild building's lobby. Shiroe controlled its access. This had major implications.

There were banks in every city, and the accounts were linked. Be it cash or items, you could process the withdrawal from any bank. For instance, you could deposit cash in Akiba and withdraw it from Hannan.

But with the intercity transport gates down, it was risky to travel to a city so far away. Shiroe's group traveled to Susukino before, but that was a rare case. After the Catastrophe, players who traveled to another city from his starting city were probably less than 0.1%

Taking into account the current environment, Shiroe now had the power to freeze the bank accounts of everyone, it was easy to understand why the participants were shocked.

Shiroe announced his plan to the Crescent Moon Alliance after confirming that they would be able to raise the 5 million gold needed. Even Henrietta couldn't calm herself and said, "Compared to Shiroe-sama, the devil is so much more likable. The devil knows he is a bad guy, but Shiroe-sama doesn't think so. 'Black Heart Glasses' is too cute a nickname for you."

"Freezing bank accounts? What else can you call it but intimidation?"

The small guild Grandeur's guild master Woodstock said in a trembling voice.

"I am only responding to Isaac-san's question, which was 'Even if the council is formed, depending on the agenda, the big guilds might object and incite a war'. My answer is there will be no war, because the one starting it will lose all access to Akiba's guild building."

"Isn't that a threat...."

Shiroe replied to his relentless questions.

"If you want to say that this is intimidation, then if a big guild like Isaac's uses the tactic 'if you propose anything that is detrimental to me, I will start a war', it will also be intimidation, correct? What is the difference between these two? I am only proposing 'setting up a council to discuss official business', and did not ignore any criticism. Please consider which request is more reasonable."

A heavy silence that threatened to crush all of them fell on the meeting room.

The participants felt that they were having a nightmare.

"How did you raise so much money? The guild building is a public zone, correct? Where did the money come from?"

"It was sponsored by us."

The one answering was Oceanic Systems' 'Strong Armed' Michitaka. His voice was returning back to normal, and he seemed to be the first to recover from the shock.

"So the challenge mentioned by Shiroe-dono is..."

"Yes, that is to start this meeting."

"So that's why."

Michitaka nodded among the waves of question demanding from him the reason for the sponsorship. There were only 11 people seated, but the impact of Shiroe's words had driven the aides into panic as well.

"Please quiet down a bit, this is too noisy!"

Michitaka bellowed at the crowd as he lowered his head to study the documents before him. The data on it described the secret behind cooking that Nyanta discovered, as well the preparation method used by Crescent Moon to make burgers. This was a real cooking recipe detailing how to prepare the food, not an 'in-game recipe' that listed the ingredients needed to create food by using the menu selection.

Earlier in the morning, before Shiroe chaired this meeting, he invited Oceanic Systems, The Rodrick Firm, and 8th District Shopping Center, the 3 major production guilds' guild masters to come, and distributed this data to them personally.

The content of the data was simple beyond description...

Crescent Moon's new food product did not come from a new game recipe.

Lured by the prospects of getting their hands on the game recipe, the production guilds were led on by the Crescent Moon Alliance, and each lost their 1.5 million gold investment.

But Shiroe was not sorry about this.

Shiroe retorted to the 3 unhappy guild masters, "Why do you think that this data is not worth 1.5 million gold?"

"Shiroe-dono, do you have anything more to add?"

Michitaka had already accepted all of this, as he asked Shiroe with a bitter smile and an unhappy look.

"That is right, no matter how Shiroe-senpai explains, we are still in a position akin to blackmail. And humans will lose their cool if they know they are under threat. You understand this correct?"

Soujiro added.

Shiroe nodded to acknowledge Soujiro and continued.

"The two of you summarized this very well. I don't think that a place with a single person holding so much authority is an ideal city. Returning to the previous topic, does everyone think that this city...no, let's go bigger, does everyone think that this world's Adventurers, are they okay with the current situation? I want to raise two main objectives. The first is to let the citizens of the city, and of this world recover their vitality. Second, set laws for the Adventurers of this city, and enforce it. Anyone opposed to this so far?"

No objections.

That was to be expected.

And Shiroe's objectives were not bad things. Recovering vitality was a good thing, both the battle guilds and production guilds would benefit.

But if the detailed plan caused a heavy load, then it would be different. If letting other players recover their vigor involved an increase in the burden of this meeting's participants, the next question would be 'who would pick this unlucky lot'.

But at this point in time, no one raised any objections.

Setting laws was the same. Some may think it was troublesome and restrictive, but the players gathered here were all Japanese playing in the Japanese server. No one could dismiss the importance of a legal system.

Depending on the content of the law, such as some evil laws that no one could agree with, some problems could also arise. But just for the proposal of setting laws, there was no reason to object.

"Okay."

'Black Sword' Isaac slammed his thick hand onto the table, as if to shoulder everyone's confusion, and announced,

"Since it has come to this, let's listen to this meeting's proposer... Log Horizon's plan in detail."

The warrior in black armor glared at Shiroe with fierce eyes. The others' gaze also fell on Shiroe. Shiroe stuck out his chest, and continued to speak with a renewed passion.

Part 2

Moving between zones was a special game design.

For instance, if you wanted to move between the guild hall and the guild building, you had to use a specific facility, a door.

From the guild building side, there were countless doors along the 2nd and 3rd floor corridors. These corridors with doors were arranged in an orderly manner and led to different zones... guild halls.

Physically speaking, there were no rooms behind the doors, since there was no space for the rooms anyway. All the doors were close to each other, and the wall behind was only 1 meter deep. Every floor had 17 such corridors, you couldn't find the space for rooms anywhere here.

Using the guild building's magical door, you would be transported to another zone known as the guild hall. That was an easier way to understand this. Vice-versa, using the door of the guild hall would transport you to the guild building.

They didn't know if it was Minori or Tohya who touched the door handle first. Facing the attacking venomous bugs, they ran away in order to avoid their attacks, and fell face-down into the guild building corridor.

"There are 2 more!"

The guild building corridor was different from usual, with several players standing by. A young man in leather armor and a girl holding a blade were guiding the Hamelin beginners down the stairs.

Minori coughed repeatedly.

She had the disgusting feeling of bugs squirming into her mouth and vomited. The fog of bugs was actually just the temporary effect of the magic. Since the caster could not see Minori, the bugs were all gone. But the revolting feeling made her feel that they were still there.

"Minori, are you okay?"

Tohya patted her back gently with a worried look. Minori who was kneeling on the floor could not see Tohya, only the floor and a spreading pool of blood.

"Tohya you are.... Wait a moment, I will cast 'Minor Heal'..."

"It's fine, I'm okay..."

Feeling Tohya raising his gaze, Minori turned her head to look. Besides her was a young swordsman in blue leather armor and two Chinese-style swords on his back, and a young girl in black.

"What are your names? Is anyone else coming?"

The young swordsman should be only slightly older than the twins. The black-haired swordsman who looked like a high-schooler asked Minori.

(Are we safe... now...?)

Minori did not know why Hamelin's members were not rushing out into the guild building's corridor. But the fact they had been rescued was real. Minori lost the strength in her legs from relief.

Minori took hold of the offered hand of the swordsman and stood up.

Tohya was already on his feet, answering the swordsman's question.

"I am Tohya, this is my sister Minori, we are definitely the last two beginners."

"Alright, that's great."

The young swordsman smiled as if a heavy weight was lifted off his shoulders.

"I am Shouryuu, nice to meet you... Okay, let's go to the lobby, your companions are all waiting there... We need to cure you and ascertain everyone is here, explain the situation and arrange for the things after..."

"Hey Minori, don't get cold feet now, it is embarrassing."

"Tohya you are such a bully."

Tohya's gentle and relieving tone didn't match his teasing words. They just needed to follow Shouryuu the swordsman, and they would be able to meet Shiroe. Just as Minori was thinking about that...

(...!)

Minori felt an unexpected chill on her back. She didn't need to turn around to know that someone was 'appearing' behind her. Minori turned her gaze behind her, but only realized she shouldn't have done that midway. What she should be doing was not trying to grasp the current situation, but to rush down the stairs. But it was already too late.

An adult hand covered her viewpoint and grabbed Minori roughly. When Minori realized this, she felt a strong force tackling her. It was Tohya.



Minori was knocked away, the hand was not able to touch her clothes. It changed its target to Tohya. This arm did not look strong, but it used a strength that made Minori's face turn green as it gripped Tohya's wrist. Tohya's steel wrist guard creaked under the pressure.

That summoner appeared after changing zones.

"You two...!"

The summoner with his face red with anger belonged to the mage class. But a mage with a high enough level would have stronger arm strength than Tohya's warrior class. In this world, physical appearance had no bearings on arm strength. From Tohya's tense and painful expression, you could tell how much damage this skinny arm could deal.

"What are you doing? What are you all scheming?"

"So noisy, just... shut...up!"

Tohya shouted with all his might.

Tohya overcame the level gap with his impulsive spirit, knocking the summoner away. The summoner would not suffer any damage, but Tohya drew his sword at the same time to protect his sister.

"You audacious brats dare to oppose me! You have nowhere else to go!"

These words awakened the pain in the twins' hearts.

They were only a burden, and they could not even defend against the violence of this man.

Even so, Minori still gathered her courage to resist. At this moment, a figure rushed to the scene like a dark sparrow from the opposite direction.

This shadow kicked Hamelin's summoner away as if he was flying, putting herself between the twins and him.

(So powerful... this person is so pretty.)

The pretty lady Minori saw used her flying knee so smoothly it seemed that she had practiced it thousands of times on the summoner. Her actions were so fluid it looked like some kind of dance.

But the words that came out of her pretty little mouth were both sharp and cruel.

"Just as weak as you look." she said with a face of contempt towards the sorcerer.

"Who are you? Akatsuki? Log Horizon? Never heard of you before!"

The summoner stopped his actions and seemed to be checking with his game menu interface. He said the guild name with a look of disdain.

But the words had no effect on the young girl, she maintained her usual serious expression and replied with a nod.

"Is that so? Isn't the label of the 3rd rate guild Hamelin more shameful? People will laugh at you as you walk on the street, it's so bad you have to run back to hide in the guild hall in shame... Am I right?"

The man was infuriated with her and grabbed her collar. Battles were restricted in the Guild Building but Hamelin members knew very well from experience what actions would be considered as battles.

Attacking with weapons or using offensive magic on others would be judged as battle actions without exceptions. But contact by hand, if it didn't cause excessive pain, would not be seen as combat.

Just like how Yakuza in the real world knew what would be considered breaking the law, they were also aware of what they were allowed to do without provoking the guards from coming.

"What did you just say? You know about Hamelin and still dare to talk shit with me? You smelly brat!"

Even facing such a cold and intimidating threat, Akatsuki showed no signs of fear. Her tiny body was lifted off the ground by this summoner, but Akatsuki calmly spoke in this position.

"... Ah, my lord? My apologies, I missed one of them. The name is Shredder. A man with bad breath. Just like his name, his face is as ugly as a shredded piece of paper... Yes."

"What are you talking about? When I drag you back into the guild hall, someone like you will..."

The sound was cut off.

Not only the sound, the man himself also disappeared.

Akatsuki landed softly, the man no longer in front of her.

"My lord, thanks for adding him to the list, he is no longer here. Seems like blacklisting someone while they are still in the zone will banish them from the zone, not sure he is outside or in his guild hall. Erm, yes. Understood, we made contact with a lady named Minori as well as a gentleman named Tohya. They seem to be the last two, I will continue my surveillance on Hamelin's guild hall entrance."

The pretty and delicate young girl maintained her serious expression, turned and approached the exhausted twins who were sitting on the floor.

"You are Minori and Tohya correct? I am Akatsuki, My lord Shiroe's ninja. I will ensure your safety, my lord is still engaged in another battle. But first of all... do you want to take a bath?"

Minori's tears fell with relief.

Part 3

"As I explained, I am proposing 2 basic policies... Improve the vigor of the city and increase security. As for the detailed plan, I will first express my view about improving vitality. I have already discussed this with a few related personnel... Mary-nee."

Shiroe's speech gave Maryele the courage to stand up.

"I think everyone already knows, Crescent Moon Alliance's business Crescent Moon is very popular, sales have been great."

Maryele placed both hands on the table and leaned forward. Shiroe could see that Henrietta who was behind her was cheering her on silently.

"Crescent Moon provides take-out meals and the main selling point is its absolutely delicious burgers. There have been various rumors and speculations, we have heard about this. As for our secret, a lot of people have speculated that we discovered recipes that are level 91 and above... It is not true."

Except for the production guilds who already knew the truth, this news caused a big commotion in the meeting room.

"I want to announce the secret here, the method is as follows.... Just preparing the ingredients normally like in the real world will be enough. But the one cooking must have the chef subclass. If the chef's level is too low, the cooking will be judged to have failed. It is that simple, the trick is to not use the in-game menu."

As the crowd began to understand the implication behind these words, the commotion became even bigger.

Ingredients needed to be made via the in-game menu, this was an assumption that had deceived everyone. This was a simple matter, but also a revolutionary discovery.

Maryele took her seat amidst the clamorous atmosphere, and Shiroe added before any other arguments were brought up.

"The one who discovered this method is the chef behind me, Nyanta. I received his permission to share this with Crescent Moon Alliance, and subsequently started Crescent Moon."

"...So that is why Oceanic Systems sponsored them..."

"...Wait, didn't they just get tricked?"

All kinds of conjecture reverberated in the meeting room for a long time. Shiroe ignored the noise and continued.

"I feel that...this discovery has a lot of potential. This was first discovered by Chief Nyanta, but I couldn't have held this meeting without it, and wouldn't have thought of having this meeting in the first place... Michitaka-san, have there been any results?"

"Yes."

Michitaka, replied with a deep voice. The seemingly calm and balanced guild master of a major production guild had a look of surprise on his face.

The 3 major production guilds had been quiet for all this time... the reason lay in Shiroe's speech.

"Our guild... with the help of The Rodrick Firm and 8th District Shopping Center, finished producing a steam engine moments ago."

This announcement shocked the table again, but it did not cause an uproar like the last surprise. After hearing this, the listeners were starting to doubt their ears, and were concentrating on the exchange between Michitaka and Shiroe in order to not miss out any details.

"Technically speaking it is still a prototype, it still has a lot of problems. But the theory has been proven to work."

"Producing results in less than half a day, that is amazing."

"The basic parts are made through the game menu, same with the tools. Making it with existing parts is an excellent idea."

Michitaka nodded at Shiroe.

"Hey... Making a steam engine is amazing, but what is this about?"

'Black Sword' Isaac asked with all his wrath and anger gone.

"Isaac-san, you don't understand? In simple terms: the discovery we mentioned, it is not just about cooking methods and chefs, but it proves 'players with production subclasses can make things manually' to create things that are not in the game menu selection. Due to Elder Tales' game design, there is nothing related to steam engines. Some food recipes don't exist within the game. But the fact that it does not exist not only affects small things like manual cooking and not using game recipe, but also expands into a dimension beyond just delicious food."

The Rodrick Firm's guild master Rodrick answered Isaac. He explained in a methodical way, acting more like a scholar than a merchant.

"From now on, things not in the game can be created, there will be an inventing craze soon... I think a lot of things in the old world can be recreated here. Let me think... Television is difficult, but there is a good chance of making radios."

8th District Shopping Center's Charasin continued where Rodrick left off.

The scholarly Rodrick and Michitaka who were smiling steadily nodded at Charasin's words. Their guilds were witness to the steam engine experiment.

"With more new inventions, it will create more demands, and there will be more ways to earn money. In other words, this will improve the vigor in the city. Because the economy might go out of control, I think we need to consider the details... But this chaos can be controlled, it won't cause depression and stagnation. In this world, items from the Middle Ages, or tools you can use with your hands can be made through the game menu. Since there are templates for everyone to follow, I predict that there will be rapid progress."

"We the 3 major production guilds have confirmed this fact, and are focusing on ways to make money and stimulate the economy. We support Shiroe-dono's proposal and think there is nothing wrong with it."

Michitaka continued after Shiroe finished.

"Then, you guys from the production guilds..."

"Yes, we support the setting of the 'Round Table Council'."

In actual fact, a small business like the Crescent Moon franchise could make 50,000 in revenue a day. But with competitors entering the market, there would be a drop in price. The average sales per person would drop from 30 gold to less than 10 gold. Despite that, there were still plenty of potential customers...which was all the players in Akiba, ten times the number Crescent Moon could handle.

It was easy to tell that this would have a huge effect on the economy.

The battle guild members could only gasp in response.

With the 3 major production guilds so confident, they could only accept that the proposal would invigorate the city.

"The city is like this because most people are too depressed to have the will to do anything. But I think the main problem is that there is nothing for them to do. The monetary expenses in this world are too low, we need to make them spend their cash to a certain degree, so they will work to earn more money. This is the correct way of doing it. I think there should be more job opportunities in the future, for example Crescent Moon is looking to hire more help for the shops, correct?"

"Yes, we have been restricted to using our members for various reasons, but I definitely want to hire more people."

Charasin nodded at Maryele's sincere words.

"Battle guilds will have more job requests such as farming for ingredients, exploration, and escort missions. If the council is formed, there will be a budget to hire the battle guilds to investigate the 'Fairy Rings'. After completing that, the next will be information about each zone, collating the data to be distributed by newspaper or other media... If there is a budget, we can achieve many things."

It had been confirmed that the Fairy Rings were in normal operation. But the rings were affected by the different moon phases and would change its teleportation destination, so the chance of going to your desired location was low. With the fact that you could no longer refer to online guides, there was no way to predict where you would go, so no one used them.

It was possible to investigate the destination you would be transferred to, but it would take a lot of resources. Not only were the 28 days of the moon phases different, the destination changed every hour. The data of each Fairy Ring might differ from another. Even limiting it to the time when the moon was out, the routes of all the Fairy Rings were an encyclopedic amount of data.

It was not that no one wanted to investigate, it was just that this project was too big, it could not be accomplished by a single guild.

But if you created the organization Shiroe proposed, to support the operation, then it was not impossible to map the routes, the battle guilds could take on this big mission.

"Next is the issue of security, there should be people who thinks laws will be restrictive, but I think this is something we have to live with. This is a Middle Ages styled alternate world, even if we don't restrict certain actions by law, I think reason and culture will allow this world to operate smoothly anyway. If there are cases of hogging grinding spots or territorial disputes, if we agree to compromise, it won't come to one party rejecting another unreasonably.

The participants nodded in agreement, including 'Black Sword' Isaac.

"But for some extreme actions, we still need some ways to stop them. One of them is banning PKing in low level zones, for instance, bullying a player below level 50 is meaningless, correct? They don't have enough wealth for themselves, hunting them is just a way to enjoy murder. The details of the

restriction can be decided later, but I feel PKing should be banned for all low-level zones around Akiba."

There were no comments for this from the others.

Guilds worthy of being invited here were all big guilds which wouldn't go down the PK line. This was expected, since guilds that would PK were mostly mid-sized guilds who relied on coercion to get what they wanted.

"The next will be human rights, the guarantee of personal freedom. In this world where death is not the end, confinement and kidnapping are more serious than in the old world. Joining and leaving guilds should be a voluntary decision, forceful and coercive actions should be illegal and punishable by law. Other things like murder and rape should be obviously be illegal too."

...Regarding this...

...Adding these rules should be unavoidable.

The meeting room had an agreeable atmosphere, the participants felt that there were no problem with this. Everyone present resented criminal acts like these, and thought 'we should get rid of this criminal behavior'.

But with the system of this world, 'restricting fighting in non-combat zones' would activate punishment by the guards to the violators, but other crimes like confinement and coercion would not activate them. In other words, there needed to be someone to monitor and judge if any laws had been broken, and even enforce punishment on the spot. But this method used a lot of resources and everyone didn't think it would work.

But Shiroe mentioned his 'freezing bank account' card, with this things would be much easier. If there were any disputes among the players, the 'Round Table Council' would investigate and blacklist any problematic players. They would then be unable to live properly in Akiba and be forced to move to another city.

For the participants, Shiroe's suggestion was very sound.

The steam engine and the support of the production guilds in the formation of the 'Round Table Council' were all surprising elements but after the explanations, everything felt reasonable.

Shiroe expressed these specific practices in order to convince the participants in forming the council after listening to the details.

Even though he had not gained total support across the board, it had reached an acceptable level and the atmosphere shifted to what they should do after forming the council.

"This is the last point...human rights not only apply to the Adventurers, but also the People of the Land as well."

Several people opened their mouth slightly. The quick-witted participants immediately linked this to the slavery problem in Susukino as the reason for raising this point.

But Shiroe was talking about a completely different matter.

"It is inconclusive how the meeting will end today, whether the draft I submit will be accepted and the formation of the 'Round Table Council'... is still unknown. But I hope everyone at least has the idea that the fantastical and twisted world we are in has affected the Elder Tales game. But as we learned from the 'chef' discovery, this is not just a game world, it is an alternate world that follows more real life physics and logic than that. Has anyone here conversed properly with the People of the Land before?"

One of the aides said, "Aren't they NPCs?"

"They are not NPCs, they have unique personalities. They have their own worries, dreams, and moral view in this world. They call themselves the People of the Land, and refer to us as Adventurers. But I need to make one thing clear: they are the original citizens of this world, we are the parasites. Akiba is an Adventurer city, so there are less People of the Land here. But in this whole world, there are definitely more People of the Land than us. Adventurers and People of the Land have different responsibilities in this world, if we carry on like this, we won't be able to build a good relationship with them."

"Relationship?"

Shiroe's words, even if part of it made them feel "so that's how it works, if you think about it he is right" and nodded their heads, but some parts were too abstract for them and annoyed them. 'In this alternate world of Elder Tales, they are not NPCs, but the people of this world' this point even if it

was not convincing, but it was a logical conjecture. But for most players, this was not sentimental enough to move them.

"Ah...Let me add on to that point."

In the air of confusion, Maryele said gingerly.

She was always tense in such formal gatherings, but she maintained her cheerful nature and explained,

"Erm, Crescent Moon is very popular, but our customers are not just players, in other words, not only Adventurers... The People of the Land also want to buy them. Even though I don't really know how to describe this, and we are not sure ourselves.... But these people also want to eat tasty food."

The meeting room became silent.

The shock this revelation gave the crowd was enough to give the sensation of the ground you were standing on cracking and caving in.

NPCs to most of the players are just NPCs, even if Brigandia in Susukino went too far, the normal players in this city treated them as 'talking vending machines'. In Elder Tales, there was nothing wrong, but that was only when this was still a game.

But because of this, to the experienced players of Elder Tales gathered in this room, Maryele's report was like a punch that destroyed common sense.

"I won't suggest that we give up returning to the original world, and I don't want to say this either... But we need to recognize that we have been in this alternate world for 2 months now, we cannot continue to be a selfish visitor. We have the preconception that the People of the Land have no emotions, but they do. In this world, according to the Elder Tales setting, we are a special class known as Adventurers, with the ability to be 'mercenaries who can learn special skills and raid the nest of monsters'. But the People of the Land are the majority in this world, because services such as banks are provided by them. They should be able to live on without us. But if we don't behave ourselves in this world, it could result in a irreparable bad end."

Shiroe sat down after he finished without waiting for any response. He was tired but felt content.

Even though Shiroe had finished his proposal, the meeting room remained silent.

Everyone was as still as a statue, Shiroe's speech was so abnormal and shocking. All present felt that they did not become trapped in the Elder Tales game, but the game world had become their reality.

Even now, they were unable to dismiss this thought.

The numerous things raised by Shiroe, such as not using menu selection to create items, the People of the Land were a force to be reckoned with in this world and had their own personalities, these facts shattered their knowledge of this world that they learned through the past two months.

"...Shiroe-kun is hinting that there may be a war with the People of the Land?"

Krusty asked in a philosophical tone.

"I think this is not my inference, but the inference the members of the council came up with."

Shiroe gave an irresponsible argument.

The arrow had been shot, Shiroe had shown his hand, disclosed all his information. In simple terms, he had displayed the world as seen through his eyes.

This was a battle Shiroe started willfully, but Shiroe wanted to win, with no one forced to lose. He just wanted victory, but not to grab it from others.

Shiroe didn't want to be too overbearing, but if possible, he wished everyone could reach this goal. Everyone referred to all the people in Akiba.

(If the people who don't understand after I have explained so clearly are in the majority... there might be war.)

Shiroe moved his gaze to the side and caught Maryele's eyes coincidentally.

Maryele seemed to be troubled, but she continued giving her sunflower-like smile. Henrietta beside her shrugged, giving a 'please help yourself' expression.

In the time that felt much longer than it really was, the first to speak in this silent meeting room was the guild master of the biggest battle guild in Akiba... D.D.D's leader 'Berserker' Krusty.

He announced in a calm voice,

"D.D.D agrees to the formation of the 'Round Table Council' as a governing group, and is willing to join."

This was followed by Soujirou in a teasing voice,

"West Wind Brigade agrees to its formation, it's been a while since I saw Shiro-senpai's 'total battlefield control' technique, I wish you had joined my guild."

"I can't allow Akiba to fall apart after all, the Black Sword Knights will join."

"Honesty agrees, we will work on improving our relationship with the People of the Land from now on."

'Black Sword' Isaac and Honesty's guild master Ein also replied.

"As we said before, we the 3 major production guilds support Shiroe and the 'Round Table Council', and hope to earn a lot of money from its formation."

Rodrick and Charasin nodded to acknowledge Michitaka's words. They had already inferred the many possibilities from Shiroe's report, and were instructing their members to carry out all sorts of experiments.

The participants after that just followed the flow and expressed their willingness to join. Grandeur and Radio Market, these small guilds also expressed that they were willing to represent the other small guilds and join the council.

Maryele seemed to have pushed herself too hard, and just threw herself exhaustively onto the table with her smile still active. Shiroe smiling sheepishly relaxed his sweaty fist under the table, being careful not to let Maryele find out.

On this day, the 'Round Table Council' was born in Akiba.

Part 4

"Captain Maryele! I finished packing the kitchen cabinet!"

"Don't call me captain, jeez, I can't stand you..."

There were people busy packing, some writing numbers on the packages, some wandering around confused.

A week after the formation of the Round Table Council, Crescent Moon Alliance's guild hall was enveloped by the hustle and bustle.

"Captain Maryele is our guild master, please sit down!"

"No, no can do! We are a small guild, you can't treat the guild master as a great person, haven't I been emphasizing this?"

"Mary, you are very clumsy, so just sit in a corner and drink your tea, don't be a bother to the others."

Maryele who was arguing with the new member was stopped by Henrietta. Her words made Maryele all teary, and she went to a corner of the office in a sulk saying "So I am such a useless fellow..."

Crescent Moon Alliance was in the middle of moving.

All the members had been active, cleaning or arranging the furniture, working hard at their assigned task. Maryele watched over the members that had grown in number, lost in her thoughts.

The Round Table Council was formed the day Hamelin was disbanded. In the same guild building that the meeting was held, Crescent Moon's Shouryuu, Serara, and Log Horizon's Akatsuki were successful in receiving the beginners who escaped from Hamelin.

Shiroe was the chairman-organizer of that meeting, and was in charge of chairing it and directing the course of the discussion. But very few people knew he was coordinating the destruction of Hamelin at the same time.

Maryele wouldn't have noticed if she was not informed about it beforehand.

Hamelin's members were blacklisted from entering the guild building, so they were unable to give chase to the beginners.

Akatsuki found out all the names of the Hamelin members. When Crescent Moon was in operation, the reason she was not present was not only to avoid being caught by Henrietta and becoming her dress-up doll.

All the beginners who escaped into the guild building were instructed by Shouryuu to complete the guild membership withdrawal paperwork. There were a total of 35 beginners confined and managed by Hamelin, all of them were covered in sweat and dust, a sorry sight.

As Serara and the volunteers from Crescent Moon Alliance prepared food and clothes for the beginners, Hamelin's members started to have a rough idea of what was happening.

The guild building was the only place that links to the Hamelin guild hall zone. Hamelin's members couldn't enter the guild building, so they were trapped in the Hamelin guild hall.

As Shiroe predicted, they still had the means to escape. The first was to use the 'Call of Home' to teleport to Akiba. Since the last place of visit was Akiba, they could teleport back to the city, it was normally used to return from a faraway zone to the city instantly.

But there was no restriction preventing you from using it while inside the city or in a guild hall. Using 'Call of Home' teleported you to the entrance of Akiba.

Another way was to commit suicide in the guild hall. You would lose some EXP as a penalty, but you could respawn at the cathedral, which was at the center of Akiba, but in essence this was a way to teleport as well.

As the Hamelin members finally realized the methods and executed them, the sun had long set and the meeting agenda had been mostly been dealt with. What was left were the details of the laws that needed to be enforced.

Things progressed to the point that Hamelin could no longer retaliate. Even if they escaped the prison that was their guild hall, they were still barred from the guild building.

The battle was already decided several phases before that.

Something unexpected had also happened.

Maryele and company were planning to introduce the beginners to the various guilds they wished to join, or to provide aid until they were independent. This plan had already been submitted to the Round Table Council for discussion.

In fact, all those present at the meeting were willing to take in the beginners and provide them with aid.

But the situation was that 16 of the beginners wanted to join other guilds, the other 19 wished to join Crescent Moon Alliance.

From what Serara said, Shouryuu was overly manly when executing the rescue operation, giving the impression of a dependable leader, increasing the number of people wanting to join Crescent Moon Alliance.

Henrietta described it as 'chicks who are imprinted by a toy chicken', which was beyond Maryele's expectation.

But Crescent Moon Alliance was a member of the Round Table Council, since the council had decided the policy of providing them with aid, they couldn't throw them out like abandoned kittens. And Crescent Moon was a warm and gentle guild that could take care of low to mid-level players, so Maryele and the members decided to accept them with a warm welcome.

But this also created problems for the operation of Crescent Moon Alliance as well.

The number of members in Crescent Moon had nearly doubled, so the guild hall had become overly crowded.

It was not compulsory for the members to all live in the guild hall, members of any guild were free to rent a hotel room in his name for a night, months, or even a year. Many adventurers did this to ensure they had their own personal space.

But this was too big an expense for beginners, and Crescent Moon Alliance members were on good terms with each other, so quite a number lived in the guild hall.

...The guild master Maryele herself also treated the guild hall like her own room, so her members would also emulate her.

"Mary, Mary? We are ready, stand up. Hold this, it's your luggage."

Maryele hugged the teddy bear and cushion Henrietta handed her, and left the office she was so used to. All the furniture had been removed, with no sign of the old days left.

"Captain Maryele, the office in the new guild hall is ready!"

Maryele thanked and smiled at the lively and eager member, and began to move.

Just like this, with the original guild hall unable to accommodate the needs of Crescent Moon Alliance, they moved to another guild hall also located in the guild building.

Even though Maryele was moving away, she was just leaving the old guild hall to the guild building corridor and entering another door from the neighboring corridor, a short distance to travel.

But the level of the new guild hall was different, increasing from 7 rooms to 31 rooms, the rental also increased 3 times. But there were still some funds left from the Crescent Moon operation.

The strict accountant Henrietta guaranteed "I think there is no problem", so Maryele was assured and made the decision to move.

There were more than 30 members, but the new guild hall was able to accommodate them, with a kitchen, meeting room, workshop, storage, living room, plus every room was much larger than before. The 31 rooms were structured like a mini castle.

The most amazing thing was the guild hall had 2 levels, and even stairs.

"So spacious!"

"Amazing, so big!"

"It feels like even a dragon can come in!"

The members frolicked around in joy, and Maryele smiled naturally. There were all sorts of ongoing tasks in every corner of the new guild hall, such as arranging furniture, removing packaging, taking notes of what things needed to be purchased.

Thinking of the expenses for carpets and tables was troubling, but the bare minimum could be created by their own production members. Even if they

still needed other items and required money, they could just treat farming as an adventure.

Thinking of the city becoming lively again made Maryele's heart itch.

(There are so many things to do... and so many things I want!)

The new office was spacious, 3 fold bigger than the last. It was so wide that it was hard to keep calm. The table and couch of the old office was in the room, but the tiny furniture would only make visitors see the room as deserted and empty.

"This... is really big, is this bigger than our old meeting room?"

Henrietta who entered holding some documents was also speechless. When she was here last time to scout, there was no furniture, only the opinion that bigger was better. But with the furniture added in there was still too much space, giving it a lonely feeling.

"What should we do, I have to live in this place?"

Maryele said in an embarrassed voice, in some ways this was troubling for her.

"I think it will be okay if we separate the area with screen doors and plants."

Henrietta made notes of the necessary items in her notebook. She was right, with such a spacious room, they could create a space for the receiving of guests. Maryele thought of separating into 3 areas, the inner one being her bedroom.

"Seems like we will need lots of things..."

"You are right... But it is a good thing."

Henrietta smiled as she looked at her notes. This beautiful smile made Maryele happy that they felt the same way.

"I love you, Henrietta!"

Maryele hugged her passionately to express her feelings.

"How did the topic change to this! Mary, you are really random!"

Henrietta struggled in surprise just as a new member came in. "Sor...Sorry for intruding!" he said as he left. As the two of them struggled in the room amidst Maryele's laughter, the two of them only stopped after using all their energy.

"Really, you..."

"I have already said I'm sorry... forgive me please! Alright? Alright?"

"I only said that buying furniture to stimulate the growth of the economy is a good thing."

Maryele's attitude made Henrietta's face red in embarrassment and her eyebrows furrow in a frown. She was always hugging Akatsuki, but couldn't get used to being hugged. The smile of her BFF made Maryele smile brightly.

"Really, this feels like the sun is suddenly coming out."

What Maryele meant was not the coming summer.

It was the Akiba after the formation of the Round Table Council.

That very night, there were tens of notices about the Round Table committee in the Akiba's central square. The news spread like wildfire. By dawn everyone knew about this notice.

But this move raised some voice of objection naturally.

This was because the governing Round Table Council members were not elected democratically. By the standards of a common Japanese, this was the same as forcing the players to accept this, with the major guilds pulling strings behind the scenes.

But in anticipation of this, the notice included all the guidelines and policies behind the formation of the council, the actions it would take in the short term as well as their execution.

Other than this, Crescent Moon's curious new cooking methods were also disclosed without any reserve.

Akiba was filled with all kinds of food just after one night. The food with taste that could only be purchased at Crescent Moon could now be prepared by all the chefs.

The new method not only required the chef skill level, the chef's knowledge and practical experience with real food was just as important. Some food that could not be said to be good were also made, but it was still miles better than the tasteless meals of days past.

Some impatient chefs set up stores immediately. Some sold freshly baked bread, some sold fruit juice, some were even selling food as simple as roasted sweet potatoes. There were even people who set up a camp fire on the roadside with a large pot of fish or meat soup and sold them by the bowl, just like people trying to reap a profit in the wake of a disaster.

The desire for good food of everybody had been met. Food that had good reviews sold out in a blink of an eye. The joy of shopping for good food that was not imaginable just yesterday was now a reality in Akiba.

The citizens welcomed this change.

And the people cheering at this change were not only the Adventurers, but the numerous People of the Land as well.

Revitalizing the city, setting up legal systems to maintain security, improving relations with the People of the Land, collection of tax to maintain the operation of the administration. A speech was given the following day to express the reasons for the policies.

The people giving speeches in the central square of Akiba included D.D.D's leader 'Berserker' Krusty, Oceanic Systems's boss Michitaka, and others. The famous representatives of Akiba were all gathered to announce the formation principles of the Round Table Council.

Collecting tax raised some doubts among the people, but by confirming the tax was half-automated and low in amount, the citizens agreed to it reluctantly. Tax revenue was based on the usage of the guild building. If players needed to go to the guild building, they would need to pay the tax of 1 gold for that day.

This was one of the criteria for entry the owner of the zone could set. According to Rodrick's estimation, the Round Table Council would be able to collect roughly 400,000 in taxes as the budget for the council.

Most of the players thought setting laws are necessary, even more so for players who were not members of a big guild. The people now understood the importance of improving the vigor of Akiba.

With food as the catalyst, the revolution that lasted a single night made all the citizens return to life.

From the end result, the Round Table Council was accepted by almost all the citizens. A governing system was just a matter of time, so instead of a dictatorship... such as one formed by a single large guild, the formation of a working autonomous institution was tens of folds better.

The 11 founding representatives of the Round Table Council received cheers and ovation as they moved to deliver their speech. Instead of the courteous applause of a political party, they were more like the cheers and encouragements of a well-meaning audience in a large banquet.

The surrounding were slowly dyed in the colors of the setting sun. The central square was full of audiences, those who were unable to move into the square watched the stage from the high-rise floors of the surrounding buildings.

They had food like bread, desserts, and kebabs in their hands as they attend this event of gigantic proportions. There were some who were drinking alcoholic beverages, the mood was closer to a festive event than a political speech.

In conclusion, the representative of the Round Table Council, Krusty, announced officially, Akiba would be setting up new organizations, as well as several projects such as the investigation of the Fairy Rings, they would need the support of the citizens.

As the people cheered to welcome this announcement, an alarmingly large amount of production players brought in all sorts of food and beverages. The 3 major production guilds under the lead of Oceanic Systems said "today is the joyous 1st day of the festival", and announced loudly "We want to empty all the delicious food in our warehouse", bringing the festive atmosphere of Akiba to its climax.

"Partying to this extent, my brain is turning into mush."

"You are right."

Maryele laughed softly, but Henrietta had a troubled look on her face.

Following the endless cheers and drinking, the hour grew late.

It had been a week after that night.

Akiba continued to receive the blessing of the sun.

Everyday there was news of new food being made, production players other than chefs were also doing all kind of experiments, hoping to make new products.

Maryele and Henrietta were most interested in shower equipment. When Elder Tales was still a game, bathtubs were just one of the many decoration that sat in the background. But to live in the alternate world, bathing had a different meaning. The humidity was lower than Japan, so the summer wouldn't make you dizzy from the heat... Despite this, the girls were still interested in this.

They heard that West Wind Brigade was the fastest in getting a mechanic, blacksmith, and carpenter to help them build a large bathhouse in their guild hall castle.

Everyday there was news circulating of someone finishing a new idea. Akiba was really reinvigorated now, the young man who planned all this, remained low profile in the rowdy festival and speech, but was satisfied by all this.

Every time Maryele thought of Shiroe and his partners, she would have the feeling of joy and gratitude, with an unexplainable feeling flowing freely.

Hamelin disbanded that day.

(He really destroyed a guild. Wah, Shiro-bou is such a terrifying child, so dangerous...)

Maryele hugged her knees on the grand chair in her office, recalling Shiroe's determined eyes behind his round frame glasses. Chairing the meeting with the fire of his conviction, he displayed a spirit that was to be feared.

The Shiroe Maryele knew was an experienced player who was always thinking about something, binding himself with all possible negative thoughts, but still has a kind and honest nature.

If you considered it, he was just a Mr. Nice Guy, always roaming around, mature, a hard to understand but dependable enchanter.

But the man with iron will who was like a man in a duel or a serious chess match, his fiery tenacity forcing his opponents to the brink, Maryele didn't recognize.

(But, he helped us...)

Maryele buried her face in her knees, and let out a laugh. Shiroe, Akatsuki, Nyanta, and Naotsugu, these dependable friends saved Serara on behalf of Crescent Moon Alliance, and restored life to Akiba.

The four who were able to separate their personal relations and see things from the view of a bystander, searching for the 'best solution'. And the four who peacefully drank tea and chatted in the Crescent Moon Alliance guild hall. Maryele was not able to see them as the same people. But even so, the fact that they were benefactors had not changed.

"...Hmmm, speaking of which, I did not see Shiro-bou and the gang today, what are they up to?"

Maryele thought of this suddenly and asked Henrietta.

"Oh, haven't you heard? Shiroe-sama and his guild are moving to a new place today."

Part 5

At this point of time, Shiroe and friends decided to purchase a building complex in the outer edge Akiba, closest to the north border of the city zone as their guild base.

Shiroe's Log Horizon guild that was formed by him several days ago, currently had 4 members.

Harmonious in his dealings, but once he was set on something, he would do whatever it took to achieve his goal. The enchanter Shiroe with the nickname he disliked, 'Black Heart Glasses.'

An apostle of parties, frivolous, witty, and loved to jokes around, the guardian who was like an iron wall Naotsugu.

With long black hair and a small stature, who played the straight man to Naotsugu's antics with a serious face, the young beautiful assassin Akatsuki.

The chef in charge of food and life counseling teacher, the silver swashbuckler, Nyanta.

There were only four members, even calling it a small guild would be overstating it, it was closer to being a mini-guild.

Oceanic System's Michitaka mentioned that Log Horizon seemed to be a temporary guild formed for the purpose of organizing the Round Table meeting. As he said, it was hard to dismiss the impression that it was just a one-trick pony.

The player known as Shiroe's long gaming life had always kept a distance from the organization known as guild, so it was no surprise others thought of his guild like that.

After the night which he spent looking at the bright moonlight, Shiroe brought Naotsugu and Akatsuki along to the Akiba which was still misty from the morning fog.

In the light of the rising sun, and amidst the singing of the crickets, Shiroe who had been cracking his brain on what to say, chose the words 'I want to form a new guild, are you willing to join?' these simple words.

(I messed up, I should have made a more intimate excuse.) Shiroe started regretting moments after speaking, but the two of them agreed to join immediately.

...So that's what this is about, Shiro finally wants to do this? I thought we will be guildless buddies forever.

...Shinobi will always be with my lord wherever you go, my lord just needs to say the word.

Just like this, with Nyanta who he invited earlier, Shiroe's guild Log Horizon gathered four members. From the number of members, Log Horizon was more like 'borderline horizon', a weak guild that held a small opening ceremony.

"My lord, are your finances okay?"

This could only be described as an empty and spacious high-rise building, Akatsuki asked as she continued cleaning.

Akatsuki had reason to be concerned, a weak guild like theirs normally wouldn't need a base.

Guilds with less than 10 members usually rented their own room in hotels, very few would rent a guild hall.

Since there were few members, the items and loot they needed to store were also few in number. Meetings could be held in the central square or in bars. There was no problem discussing battle tactics on the roadside, and even telepathy should be able to suffice.

Guilds with slightly more members could rent a guild hall from the guild building as a base.

The guild building was near the city center, the price was reasonable and the environment was clean, so it was very popular. The number of rooms ranges from the cheap 3 room to the 31 rooms enough to accommodate a hundred people, suitable for all sizes. The market and bank were also near. In short it was very convenient, most guilds would make use of this.

As for even bigger guilds, the guild hall would be too cramped.

The biggest room provided by the guild building was 31 rooms, Crescent Moon Alliance's Maryele felt that this was a castle, but that was for a 30-40 member guild. If the number went above 200, this space would not be enough.

Hence, big guilds on the level of Black Sword Knights and West Wind Brigade would opt to choose a building within Akiba for purchase, and the zone within would serve as its headquarters.

Production guilds like Oceanic Systems which claimed to have 5000 members, would divide themselves based on their specialties into different departments, and each department would have its own building. For situations like these, the guild would have several buildings as bases.

Log Horizon's average level was 90, but their numbers were small. A guild like this owning a building was inefficient. If they wanted to set up a base, renting a guild hall from the guild building would be more than enough, Akatsuki was worried about the money involved.

"This part is, yeah, I can still afford this."

Shiroe brushed the wall with a scrub on a long stick as he answered. The complex which was originally used as a warehouse with a big shopping area was pierced from the 1st to the 6th floor by a giant tree.

The middle of the floor had a large hole, the tree with moss which was probably hundreds of years old grew through the gaps on each floor towards the sky, and spread its leaves out on the ceiling into a green dome cover.

Akiba was engulfed by the greenery, but trees merging with buildings on this level was a rare sight.

"This complex is cheap because of the state it is in, and the lack of stairs makes it undesirable."

"Hmm... you are right."

Shiroe moved away debris in response. The main bulk of the clearing operation had already been done with the assistance of the young Crescent Moon Alliance guild members over the course of several days. But it was still in ruins, and a long way from being habitable.

This place might have been a store selling large family appliances, the 1st floor had few walls and the ceiling was high, maybe 4 or more meters.

In ancient times, that was the time when these buildings were built, there must have been stairs here. The empty space where the stairs used to be and the stairs that were definitely beside the elevator well had probably been swallowed by the tree branches.

A building of this scale was cheap but unpopular probably because it was far from the city center and inconvenient to use.

"But... Akiba is a crowded city, So this is a great find right? We can just rebuild the stairs."

Just as Naotsugu who was coming down from the 2nd floor said, the metal stairs linking the 1st and 2nd floors had been completed. It looked dull and cold but it was steady and wide, there was no problem using it.

"So, why is it that we cannot fix the hole in the floor of buildings when it was still a game?"

Shiroe agreed with Naotsugu.

Nyanta's discovery not only had an impact on the culinary world, all the production players were now researching and publishing new products all the time. No, not only production subclasses, even role-playing subclasses were doing experiments, testing what they could do with their skills in this alternate world.

These stairs were the result of one of the experiments.

When the Elder Tales world was still a game, moving the walls or floors was something that was unimaginable, but experiments for the past week proved it could be done.

There were only stairs between the 1st and 2nd floors for now, the 3rd floor onward required the use of ropes, but stairs would only be built if there was a need to expand.

This zone was cheaper than the market rates, but it was still a considerable sum of money. Other than that, he was also prepared to pay more cash to hire people to make the stairs. The finances of a weak and small guild were not enough to refurbish the whole building.

Building the stairs and repairing the floors designated to be individual rooms was a big project, and they hired Oceanic Systems to carry it out. The guild master said "With some creativity, ruins which are suitable for living can be used in other ways. Making stairs is an interesting idea." and agreed to take the job.

Michitaka personally came to supervise the project, Naotsugu bargained with him "Hey, since this is such an interesting idea, give us a discount!" Michitaka considered this seriously, which was amusing to Shiroe.

Even though they knew this would become a new business, the ease of making parts from materials through the game menu differed largely from the real world, making it hard to calculate a reasonable cost.

Henrietta mentioned before about the balance of supply and demand, full employment and minimum wage, these kinds of professional terms. Even though Shiroe understood the theory and structure, using it to calculate a value practically was near impossible. No matter what, the economy of this alternate world was full of holes, how much real world economic concepts could be applied here was a big question.

Now they could only use what Michitaka described as 'Give a rough estimate, wait some time for it to stabilize, and use that number as a guide for pricing', allowing him to name a price he guessed to be okay.

Today, the four of them also woke early and started cleaning.

But with only the 4 of them, it was impossible to clean the 6 floors and 1 basement level of the complex. And the hole in the ceiling got larger the higher you went, and all the windows were broken.

The 4 of them had long given up cleaning the whole place, just concentrating on the 2nd floor that would serve as the living area. The 2nd floor only had 2 areas with gaping holes, they should be able to clear out 8 rooms to serve as personal living space.

With this there would be no problem in the short term.

But they did not know if they could finish in the summer, or if it would drag into the fall. Shiroe considered the temperature and weather, and hoped to finish before winter.

But as Shiroe was busy creating their own living space, they had many guests visiting. Shiroe set this zone to be freely accessible to all, so anyone he knew could just waltz into the 1st floor of the building and call for them loudly.

Henrietta who should also be moving today came with a basket of fruits politely, congratulating Log Horizon on founding their base. Akatsuki who received the gift fearfully was caught in an instant and forced to wear a 'special complimentary gift', but let's not go into details.

West Wind Brigade's Soujirou along with the beautiful healer Nazuna who was also in the Debauchery Tea Party, came to visit with some peach wine. The fragrance complimented the summer nicely, and was said to be made with care by the brewer of West Wind Brigade.

8th District Shopping Center's Charasin also came to discuss things with Shiroe.

Charasin proposed hiring People of the Land to handle the administrative duties of the Round Table Council... which was mainly mail and clerical work.

Asking an Adventurer to sit in a office and deal with menial work was hard and expensive. The two of them decided that they should move in this direction.

Charasin expressed that he planned to ask the People of the Land he had in mind and left with a smile.

Battle guild leaders who spent the most time was surprisingly Black Swords Knights' Isaac. He came with a few summoners from his guild without invitation, said "Hey, 'Black Heart Glasses,' this is a convenient and spacious place, lend it to me to do some battle simulations."

Before Naotsugu had time to complain, the summoners conjured 'Undines of Flowing Water', and flooded the 1st and 2nd floors with water, washing it thoroughly. In this world with no tap water, this was a great help.

Isaac finished the fruit Henrietta brought and left. But Chief Nyanta said softly "Black Sword Knights are not bad guys nya", which left a deep impression on Shiroe. Perhaps this was the way Isaac wanted to restore his relationship with Shiroe.

The reason Shiroe decided to buy a building... this building for his guild, half of it was this.

Since he was a member of the Round Table Council, he would have quite a number of guests. The people in his friends list were also increasing every day. Some friends were not added because he wanted to deepen his friendship with them, but for the chance of increasing his networking, so he needed to add them for future telepathy use.

There would be a lot of visitors from now on, and it might involve long discussions and talks. It was uncertain if there would be grand events similar to the setting-up of the Round Table meeting, but if that happened, the kitchen, workshop, and storage were all necessary rooms.

Shiroe considered all these factors, that's why he chose a spacious building in the outer edge of the city.

"This is what they mean by 'a big environment can be flexibly used for small things'."

"And it seems like Naotsugu likes tall places."

"Shiro, it's because you are like this that Akatsuki keeps bullying me and calling me stupid. My stock market price has fallen to the limit."

To Shiroe, Naotsugu was the friend he could talk most freely with heart to heart. Even when they chatted about pointless things, he could feel at ease.

"Okay, Shiroe-chi and Naotsugu-cchi stop bickering, if we don't clean up we won't be able to make it to dinner nya."

"Curry? Is today's menu curry? I love curry!"

"Stupid Naotsugu, it is indeed curry today."

"Is that so? Yahoo!"

Nyanta and Akatsuki joined the conversation.

In Shiroe's long experience playing Elder Tales, he had joined guilds before. But now he understood that he was there as a guest, he was not really a member.

He couldn't view the tag of a guild as the same level as the home for him and his companions.

He needed to treasure it from the bottom of his heart and protect it.

He already learned this reason in the Debauchery Tea Party. Instead of caring whether the group had the tag of a guild, it was more important to form camaraderie in their time together.

Whenever the city was dyed in the red light of the sun, Shiroe would have a special feeling. When it was a game, the evening was just a special effect on the screen, but that was not so in this world.

The group of black birds returning from the forest let out a loud and lonely cry as they flew past.

The Adventurers returning from their raids walked along the shops on either side of the main paveway into the central square. Teams with good loot discussed their future plans in high spirits. Parties that did not do well swore to clear their shame of failure next time. The abandoned building and ruins covered with vines were dyed dull red. These warriors and the production players in the city, both the Adventurers and the People of the Land, left their long shadows on the ground.

This week, it seemed that even dusk had its fragrance as well.

The many shops sold dinner to the tired warriors and the production players who had spent the whole day working. In the bars operated by the People of the Land, not only was the beer tasty, they also provided simple dishes as well.

As the night becomes apparent, the red bronze sky changed to a deep rose color gradually, then into dirty green and finally blue. In this world where night came later than in the old world, the citizens had already finished their work for the day, and were preparing for tomorrow.

"My lord, the first star is out."

"That is not important, I am so hungry that I cannot move anymore."

After finishing moving the things, Akatsuki and Naotsugu chilled beside the window.

In this dusk before the lights came on, the two partners turned and looked at Shiroe.

Their calm expressions made Shiroe believe that this was his home.

The Debauchery Tea Party was now gone from his heart, this process had taken a very long time. If he compared the two, he would unconsciously hurt many people and places, Shiroe reflected on this.

He did not understand such a simple thing, and took such a long detour, he felt so useless. Shiroe reproached himself this way, but the two of them just give him a strange look and asked: "My lord, what is it?" "Are you hungry? Hunger is so dangerous."

"Hmm? Where is Chief? He's not back yet?"

Shiroe perked himself up, discovered that Nyanta was not around, and recalled that he was out purchasing spice.

"Now that you mention it, Chief is slow today. Could he be shopping on the streets and eating? [4]"

"That is not funny at all."

As Shiroe listened to the two bicker, Shiroe was still concerned. At this moment, a calm and slow voice came from the floor below:
"Shiroe-chi...Naotsugu-chi...Akatsuki-nyaan...."

That should be Chief.

Were the things too heavy? No, that shouldn't be the case in this world. The 3 discussed as they made their way to the stairs. In the moonlit and empty first floor, they saw a shape that looked like it was made with wires... Nyanta.

"Chief, what's up, I'm hungry, let's eat some curry...."

"Yes, I am hungry, Master."

Naotsugu and Akatsuki popped the upper half of their bodies from the top of the stairs saying these words like children. Nyanta laughed heartily "Nya hahaha", and pushed two things from behind to the front.

"....Eh"

"Ano...Ano..."

"Isn't this Tohya and Minori?"

The twins shaman girl and samurai boy, their faces were so red that you could tell even in the night. The two of them who tidied their hair and changed into clean equipment over the past week were being encouraged by Nyanta.

"I saw them wandering round and round the building when I returned from grocery shopping. If it was me I would be turning into butter candy nya."

"Are the two of you alright? Crescent Moon Alliance is moving today right?"

Shiroe asked them. Crescent Moon Alliance was also moving to a guild hall 2 levels higher, there should be a celebratory feast after finishing the move. Maryele who liked lively atmospheres wouldn't let their 2 cute new members wander around in the night.

"We are fine Niichan, that is...."

"Yes?"

Tohya looked at Shiroe who was halfway down the stairs, and let out a loud voice that he usually used.

"...We came to let Niichan take us into the guild."

"Ah....?"

"We want to become Shiroe-san's students... the Crescent Moon Alliance has been taking good care of us for the past week, but we didn't join their guild... not even now. Tohya and I are the last two beginners who left Hamelin that are without a guild."

Minori added in details to her brother's overly direct words.

"We have worked hard thanks to Niichan's lessons. If Niichan starts a guild, we also want to join. I might be weak now, but I will become stronger."

"We might trouble you... But we decided not to use this as an excuse, please let us join you."

"Ah... that is..."

Maybe they would be rejected.

What would happen to them then?

The twins who forced out these words with all their might were so tense that you would feel nervous just looking at them.

Shiroe heard of the harsh conditions in Hamelin. They were new players to Elder Tales and had no friends to rely on, this must be a hard experience.

If they stayed in Crescent Moon Alliance, there must be many comrades with the same experience, and of similar level, and they would be treated well. But the two of them declined joining Crescent Moon Alliance, and came to Shiroe with the risk of having nowhere to go if they were rejected.

Shiroe was unable to understand their feelings, but he could feel their do-or-die determination.

The last week of Elder Tales being just a game was spent together with them, Shiroe did not know what he said during this period that made them like him so much.

He never thought he would become a guiding post for others, Shiroe didn't have such experiences before, so he was silent when facing their request, unable to give a proper reply.

Nyanta gazed at Shiroe, his slit-like eyes filled with gentleness and slowly becoming a line, and said with a kind tone.

"Shiroe-chi, don't daze off, you are the guild master nya..."

Guild master.

Master of a guild.

Leader of a guild.

That's right, he was correct in saying that, Shiroe realized. Because he was too familiar with his companions and they understood what each other was thinking about, Shiroe didn't feel like a guild master even after forming a guild.

He was never a guiding post for others before.

He had been using others to guide him all the while, but he had never imagined that he would become a guiding post too.

Shiroe turned and looked at his two hungry comrades who were sticking their heads out. Naotsugu was sticking up his thumb and saying "Of course." Akatsuki was nodding her head with a gentle expression.

"Alright, we, the Log Horizon guild welcomes Tohya and Minori to join. The first task of the newcomers is to eat curry with the core members of the guild... Are you ready?"

"Yes!" "Niichan!"

Adding in the two tender voices, the members had increased to 6.

In the alternate world which used to be a game called Elder Tales, a new guild was officially made.

...The guild was named Log Horizon.

In the rural area of Akiba, where an old tree pierced through an abandoned building, this was where the small group of companions lived.

[8TH DISTRICT SHOPPING CENTER]
CHARASIN

[THE RODRICK FIRM]
RODRICK

[OCEANIC SYSTEMS]
MICHITAKA

[RADIO MARIET]
AKANEYA



FIRST SESSION OF THE ROUND
TABLE COUNCIL MEMBERS

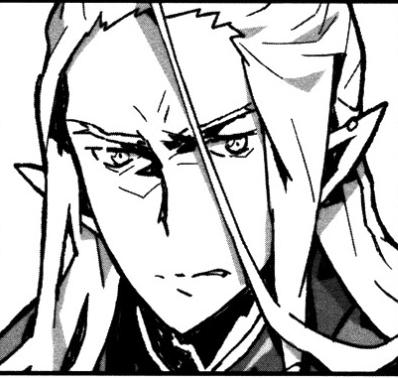
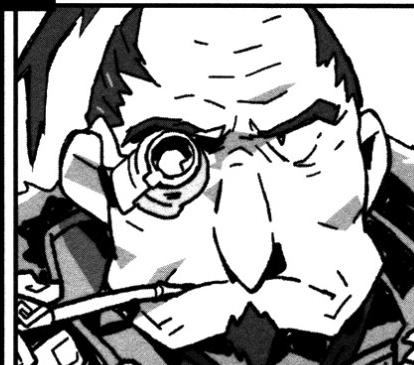
ANECDOTE LOGS

WITH THE FUTURE OF AKIBA ON THE
LINE, THE TWELVE GUILDS WHO
ANSWERED TO SHIROE'S CALL.

THE LEADERS OF THE GUILDS THAT
REPRESENTS AKIBA WILL BE
ANALYZED THOROUGHLY IN THE
NEXT PAGE!



HEROIC EPISODE



First Session of the Round Table Council members.

Anecdote Logs

With the future of Akiba on the line,
The twelve guilds who answered to Shiroe's call.
The leaders of the guilds that represents Akiba,
Will be analyzed thoroughly in the next page!

<table width=80%><tr><td colspan="2">

[BERSERKER]
KRUSTY



[BLACK SWORD]
ISSAC

LIVING YOUR LIFE TO THE FULL-EST 'TIL THE MOMENT OF YOUR DEATH; THAT IS THE RULE TO LIVE BY FOR ANY WORLD.

THE SEATING ORDER
GUILD

D.D.D.

CLASS
GUARDIAN

SUB CLASS
BERSERKER



THOSE WITHOUT KILLING INTENT ARE WORTHLESS! COME AT ME WITH MURDEROUS INTENT!

LEADING AN ELITE BATTLE GUILD WITH THE POLICY OF ACCEPTING MEMBERS WHO HAVE REACHED THE LEVEL CAP. OTHER PLAYERS' IMPRESSION OF THEM AS "USELESS GAMING NERDS GROUP" DESCRIBES THEM ADEQUATELY. ISSAC HIMSELF IS ALSO FAMOUS, WITH HIS DEMON SWORD 'DARK SORROW' IN HAND, HE IS SAID TO BE THE STRONGEST GUARDIAN IN ALL SERVERS.

THE MANY CHALLENGES COMPLETED AND THE NUMBER OF GUILD MEMBERS LIFTS THE BATTLE GUILD D.D.D TO THE PINNACLE OF THE YAMATO SERVER. THEIR LEADER IS ALWAYS LEADING FROM THE FRONT IN CHALLENGING LARGE-SCALE RAIDS, EVEN TAKING ON RAID'S ON THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL THAT ARE SAID TO BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR JAPANESE PLAYERS TO COMPLETE. HE COMPLETED THE 100-MAN RAID CHALLENGE 'APOSTLE'S SKY TOWER' PROVING THEM WRONG, AND IS ONE OF THE FEW STRATEGISTS OF BIG-SCALE RAIDS.

BLACK SWORD KNIGHTS

CLASS
GUARDIAN

SUB CLASS
SWORD FIGHTER

[SAGE]
EIN



[EYES OF MYSTERY]
WILLIAMS

THE SHARING OF KNOWLEDGE IS THE COMMON WILL OF ALL LIVING IN THIS WORLD.

THE GUILD MASTER OF HONESTY WHO WORKS HARD TO COLLECT DATA ON BIG-SCALE RAIDS AND SHARES THEM PUBLICLY. THEY ARE THE FIRST TO PUBLICLY SHARE THEIR STRATEGY GUIDES FOR THE MAJOR RAIDS 'RITUAL FOR THE RETURN OF THE KING' AND 'THE 9 BIG PRISONS FOR HEROES', HELPING TO BRING VITALITY TO THE SERVER. BUT THEY OFTEN COME INTO CONFLICTS WITH OTHER TOP GUILDS BECAUSE OF THEIR POLICY OF SHARING INFORMATION.

MEETINGS ARE BORING AND USELESS. I WANT TO WALK MY OWN PATH!

WITH MOST PLAYERS OPERATING AROUND THEIR NATIONAL SERVER, THE FIRST GUILD TO START AN OVERSEAS MISSION TO KOREA, OBTAINING MANY UNKNOWN LOOTS, THE SILVER SWORD GUILD. IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE TO BE PREPARED FOR SUCH RAIDS, BUT THEIR GUILD MASTER SAYS 'WE WON'T GET THE DATA UNLESS WE FIGHT'. HIS PERSISTENT STYLE MADE HIM FAMOUS.

THE SEATING ORDER
GUILD

SILVER SWORD

CLASS

ASSASSIN

SUB CLASS

HUNTER

THE SEATING ORDER
GUILD

HONESTY

CLASS

SHAMAN

SUB CLASS

SCHOLAR



SHAMAN

SCHOLAR

SUB CLASS

HUNTER

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334

<tr><td width=50% valign="top">Name: 'Sage' Ein

Guild: Honesty

Class: Shaman

Subclass: Scholar

Quote: "The sharing of knowledge is the common will of all living in this world."

The guild master of Honesty who works hard to collect data on big-scale raids and shares them publicly. They are the first to publicly share their strategy guides for the major raids 'Ritual for the Return of the King' and 'The 9 Big Prisons for Heroes', helping to bring vitality to the server. But they often come into conflicts with other top guilds because of their policy of sharing information. <td width=50% valign="top">Name: 'Berserker' Krusty

Guild: D.D.D

Class: Guardian

Subclass: Berserker

Quote: "Living your life to the fullest 'til the moment of your death, this is the rule to live by for any world."

The many challenges completed and the number of guild members lifts the battle guild D.D.D to the pinnacle of the Yamato server. Their leader is always leading from the front in challenging large-scale raids, even taking on raids on the international level that are said to be impossible for Japanese players to complete. He completed the 100-man raid challenge 'Apostle's Sky Tower' proving them wrong, and is one of the few strategists of big-scale raids. <tr><td width=50% valign="top">Name: 'Eyes of Mystery' Williams

Guild: Silver Sword

Class: Assassin

Subclass: Hunter

Quote: "Meetings are boring and useless. I want to walk my own path!"

With most players operating around their national server, the first guild to start an overseas mission to Korea, obtaining many unknown loots, the Silver Sword guild. It is common knowledge to be prepared for such raids, but their guild master says 'we won't get the data unless we fight'. His persistent style made him famous.<td width=50% valign="top">Name: 'Black Sword' Issac

Guild: Black Sword Knights

Class: Guardian

Subclass: Sword fighter

Quote: "Those without killing intent are worthless! Come at me bro with murderous intent!"

Leading an elite battle guild with the policy of accepting members who have reached the level cap. Other players' impression of them as "Useless gaming nerds group" describes them adequately. Issac himself is also famous, with his demon sword 'Dark Sorrow' in hand, he is said to be the strongest guardian in all servers.<tr><td colspan="2">

[SWORD SAINT]
SOUJIROU



[STRONG ARMED]
MICHITAKA



JUST KILL THEM SINCE THEY ARE THE ENEMIES, ISN'T THAT OBVIOUS?

THE SEATING ORDER
GUILD
CLASS
SUB CLASS

SAMURAI
SUB CLASS

SWORD SAINT
SUB CLASS

PREVIOUSLY FROM THE DEBAUCHERY TEA PARTY, WEST WIND BRIGADE'S GUILD MASTER. THERE ARE MANY GUILDS CHALLENGING THE MAJOR RAIDS AIMING TO BE THE FIRST TO COMPLETE IT. HIS GUILD SURPRISINGLY COMPLETED SEVERAL OF THEM BEFORE OTHER BATTLE GUILDS, SOLIDIFYING THEIR PLACE AS THE NEW UPCOMING GUILD TO LOOK OUT FOR. SOUJIROU IS FAMOUS FOR HIS LUCK WITH WOMEN, AND IS THE SOURCE OF ENVY SINCE THE GAME PERIOD.

GUILD
OCEANIC SYSTEMS
CLASS
MONK
SUB CLASS

I HAVE BEEN DOWN ON MY LUCK IN DRAWING LOTS. WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

THERE ARE SEVERAL DEPARTMENTS IN OCEANIC SYSTEMS, EACH DEPARTMENT HEAD IS KNOWN AS THE SECTION CHIEF, MICHTAKA IS THE ONE LEADING ALL THE SECTION CHIEFS AS THE BOSS. IN MMORPG, THERE IS ALWAYS FRICTION IN THE INTERRELATIONS OF MEMBERS, BUT THE BULKY BLACKSMITH USES HIS CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP TO SMOOTH THINGS OVER, RUNNING THE BIGGEST GUILD IN YAMATO SMOOTHLY. HE IS HIGHLY RESPECTED.

[FAIRY PHARMACIST]
RODRICK

THE SEATING ORDER
GUILD
CLASS
SUB CLASS

PHARMACIST

THIS DISCOVERY IS INTRIGUING, LET'S PERFORM MORE EXPERIMENTS IMMEDIATELY.

THE RODRICK FIRM'S GUILD MASTER. THE GUILD POSSESS RARE INGREDIENT LOOT FROM DIFFICULT QUESTS LIKE 'THE SAVIOR OF CORRUPTED SOULS' OR 'TONY'S WHITE BIRD'. THIS A PRODUCTION GUILD IN PRODUCING AND SELLING HIGH-LEVEL ITEMS, SPECIALIZING IN CONSUMABLE ITEMS LIKE POTIONS AND RUNES, LEAVING OTHER GUILDS IN THE DUST.



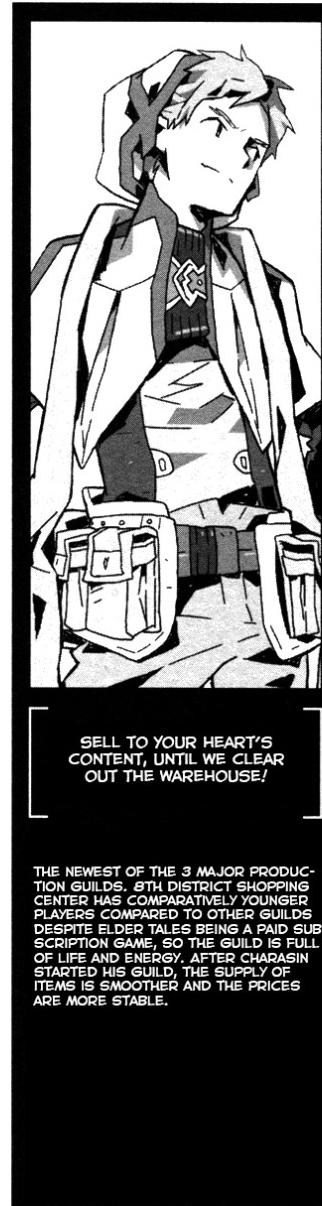
[YOUNG BOSS]
CHARASIN

THE SEATING ORDER
GUILD
CLASS
SUB CLASS

MERCHANT

SELL TO YOUR HEART'S CONTENT, UNTIL WE CLEAR OUT THE WAREHOUSE!

THE NEWEST OF THE 3 MAJOR PRODUCTION GUILDS, 8TH DISTRICT SHOPPING CENTER HAS COMPARATIVELY YOUNGER PLAYERS COMPARED TO OTHER GUILDS DESPITE ELDER TALES BEING A PAID SUBSCRIPTION GAME, SO THE GUILD IS FULL OF LIFE AND ENERGY. AFTER CHARASIN STARTED HIS GUILD, THE SUPPLY OF ITEMS IS SMOOTHER AND THE PRICES ARE MORE STABLE.



<tr><td width=50% valign="top">Name: 'Fairy Pharmacist' Rodrick

Guild: The Rodrick Firm

Class: Summoner

Subclass: Pharmacist

Quote: "This discovery is intriguing, let's perform more experiments immediately."

The Rodrick Firm's guild master. The guild possess rare ingredient loot from difficult quests like 'The Savior of Corrupted Souls' or 'Tony's White Bird'. This a production guild in producing and selling high-level items, specializing in consumable items like potions and runes, leaving other guilds in the dust. <td width=50% valign="top">Name: 'Sword Saint' Soujiro

Guild: West Wind Brigade

Class: Samurai

Subclass: Sword Saint

Quote: "Just kill them since they are enemies, isn't that obvious?"

Previously from the Debauchery Tea Party, West Wind Brigade's guild master. There are many guilds challenging the major raids aiming to be the first to complete it. His guild surprisingly completed several of them before other battle guilds, solidifying their place as the new upcoming guild to look out for. Soujiro is famous for his luck with women, and is the source of envy since the game period.<tr><td width=50% valign="top">Name: 'Young Boss' Charasin

Guild: 8th District Shopping Center

Class: Summoner

Subclass: Merchant

Quote: "Sell to your heart's content, until we clear out the warehouse!"

The newest of the 3 major production guilds. 8th District Shopping Center has comparatively younger players compared to other guilds despite Elder Tales being a paid subscription game, so the guild is full of life and energy.

After Charasin started his guild, the supply of items is smoother and the prices are more stable.<td width=50% valign="top">Name: 'Strong Armed' Michitaka

Guild: Oceanic Systems

Class: Monk

Subclass: Blacksmith

Quote: "I have been down on my luck in drawing lots, why is this happening?"

There are several departments, each department head is known as the section chief, Michitaka is the one leading all the section chiefs as the boss. In MMORPG, there is always friction in the interrelations of members, but the bulky blacksmith uses his charismatic leadership to smooth things over, running the biggest guild in Yamato smoothly, and is highly respected.<tr><td colspan="2">

[CANNON BALL]
WOODSTOCK



THE SEATING ORDER
GUILD
CLASS
SUB CLASS

THE FEELING OF ACCELERATION AS YOU FALL FROM THE SKY IS ECSTATIC!

ORIGINALLY FROM THE BLACK SWORD KNIGHTS GUILD, HE OPPOSED THEIR ELITIST POLICY AND FORMED HIS OWN GUILD. HE MAINLY SUPPLIES LOW- AND MID-LEVEL PLAYERS WITH CONSUMABLES. THEIR PROFIT IN THE SHORT TERM CAN EVEN RIVAL THOSE OF A MAJOR PRODUCTION GUILD. NOT ONLY DID HE SET UP A WEBSITE TO RECRUIT MEMBERS, HE ALSO HOLDS WELCOME PARTIES FOR NEWCOMERS AS WELL, WHICH IS FAMOUS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE OF THE GAME.



THE SEATING ORDER
GUILD
CLASS
SUB CLASS

THIS IS GOOD. THE SHINE, STRENGTH, AND LEVEL OF DETAILS ARE UNCOMMON.

HIS YEARS AND EXPERIENCES WITH ELDER TALES ARE MUCH LONGER THAN SHIROE'S. HIS GUILD RADIO MARKET IS ALSO AN OLD GUILD THAT DISLIKES FACTION RIVALRIES, AND MAINTAINS A LOW PROFILE. IT HAS BECOME A HARBOR FOR SOLO PLAYERS, RECEIVING STABLE SUPPORT FROM MEMBERS. INCLUDING AKANEYA, THERE ARE MANY ODD HIGH-LEVEL PLAYERS, AND HAS THE REPUTATION OF A CAMP FOR ODDBALLS.

RADIO MARKET
SORCERER
SUB CLASS

SUB CLASS
MECHANIC

[SUNFLOWER OF AKIBA]
MARYLE



YOU ARE RIGHT, EVERYONE LOVES AKIBA AFTER ALL!

THE SEATING ORDER
GUILD
CRESCENT MOON ALLIANCE
CLASS
CLERIC

LOG HORIZON
CLASS
ENCHANTER
SUB CLASS
SCRIBE

WITH A GENEROUS AND OPEN HEART, GENTLE TO BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, SHE IS POPULAR IN THE WHOLE PLAIN OF AKIBA. SHE HAS NEVER TAKEN PART IN ANY MAJOR RAIDS, BUT HAS A WIDE NETWORK OF FRIENDS AND IS VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE. ONE OF HER ALLURING POINTS IS HER LARGE BREASTS. SHE AND THE BEAUTIFUL ACCOUNTANT HAS BEEN BEST FRIENDS SINCE THEY WERE CLASSMATES.

IF WE GIVE UP WHEN FACING PROBLEMS OF THIS LEVEL, WE SHOULD NOT HAVE EXPECTED ANYTHING FROM THE START.

THE STRATEGIST OF THE LEGENDARY DEBAUCHERY TEA PARTY AND MANY SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS. A GRADUATE ENGINEERING STUDENT, HE IS PROFICIENT IN ANALYZING THE GAME FROM LOGS AND MAPS, AND CREATED 3D MAPS OF MAZE USING CAD SOFTWARE, AND EVEN USED THE TERRAIN ACCORDINGLY IN HIS BATTLE TACTICS. A YOUNG MAN WHO IS POLITE, GENTLE, AND MAINTAINS A LOW PROFILE. BUT WHEN HIS MIND IS SET ON SOMETHING, HE WILL ACHIEVE HIS GOALS USING ANY METHODS NECESSARY.

[BLACKHEART GLASSES]
SHIROE

THE SEATING ORDER
GUILD
CLASS
CLERIC

LOG HORIZON
CLASS
ENCHANTER
SUB CLASS
SCRIBE

THE SEATING ORDER
GUILD
CLASS
SUB CLASS

<tr><td width=50% valign="top">Name: 'Sunflower of Akiba' Maryele

Guild: Crescent Moon Alliance

Class: Cleric

Subclass: Carpenter

Quote: "You are right, everyone loves Akiba after all!"

With a generous and open heart, gentle to both men and women, she is popular in the whole plain of Akiba. She has never taken part in any major raids, but has a wide network of friends and is very knowledgeable. One of her alluring points is her large breasts, she and the beautiful accountant has been BFF since they were classmates.<td width=50%
valign="top">Name: 'Cannon Ball' Woodstock

Guild: Grandeur

Class: Assassin

Subclass: Alchemist

Quote: "The feeling of acceleration as you fall from the sky is ecstatic!"

Originally from the Black Sword Knights guild, he opposed their elitist policy and formed his own guild. He mainly supplies low- and mid-level players with consumables, their profit in the short term can even rival those of a major production guild. Not only did he set up a website to recruit members, he also holds welcome parties for newcomers as well, which is famous within and outside of the game. <tr><td width=50%
valign="top">Name: 'Black Heart Glasses' Shiroe

Guild: Log Horizon

Class: Enchanter

Subclass: Scribe

Quote: "If we give up when facing problems of this level, we should not have expected anything from the start."

The strategist of the legendary Debauchery Tea Party and many successful campaigns. A graduate engineering student, he is proficient in analyzing the game from logs and maps, and created 3D maps of maze

using CAD software, and even used the terrain accordingly in his battle tactics. A young man who is polite, gentle, and maintains a low profile. But when his mind is set on something, he will achieve his goals using any methods necessary.<td width=50% valign="top">Name: 'Hermit' Akaneya

Guild: Radio Market

Class: Sorcerer

Subclass: Mechanic

Quote: "This is good, the shine, strength, and level of details are uncommon."

His years and experiences with Elder Tales are much longer than Shiroe's. His guild Radio Market is also an old guild that dislikes faction rivalries, and maintains a low profile. It has become a harbor for solo players, receiving stable support from members. Including Akaneya, there are many odd high-level players, and has the reputation of a camp for oddballs.

Afterword

Greetings, it's been a month, I am Mamare Touno.

Thank you for purchasing 'Log Horizon 2: Knights of Camelot', this book is the edited version of the web arc 'The Beginning of a Different World Part 2'. Shiroe and friends are finally starting their Log Horizon adventure, please anticipate their active future!

I am done with the introduction, next part is about Mamare(younger sister).

Thanks to the support of everyone, Log Horizon is published successfully, so I want to treat Mamare(younger sister) to a meal to celebrate.

But my sister is weak and frail, so she is unable to travel far, and can only eat in the neighborhood.

But there are no worries, we are just going to eat Monjayaki.

Since we are living in the residential area of commoners, Monjayaki is a basic delicacy.

Mamare(younger sister) seems unable to grasp the situation and gives a '??' expression, just like a stupid monkey who doesn't understand the term 'treat you to a meal'. Maybe as a brother I failed to do my part in educating her. I seem to be digging my own grave, so let's move on.

As everyone predicted, Mamare has not informed his family about publishing a book. No, I didn't mean to keep it a secret, but when I confessed last month I was accused with the words 'Stop lying', and was treated like air, missing my chance to explain.

My motive of eating out was to use this chance to explain under the pretext of eating Monjayaki, but Mamare(younger sister) threatened me immediately when she took a seat.

Mamare(younger sister), why don't you believe your brother? I told her she can order whatever she wants, but the plan backfired, and she said: "Stupid brother, what are you scheming?" these cruel words.

I calmed her down with my sweet-talk, and the two of us ate Monjayaki.

Mentaiko cheese Monjayaki plus New Year cakes.

Not only Mamare(younger sister), the whole Mamare clan have a habit of constantly eating the same thing if you love it. The late Mamare(mother) spent one whole summer eating noodles, Mamare myself recently has been eating 'east dove brand' walnut pancake and have bought a whole box of it.

For Mamare(younger sister), she is eating pickled eggplants and cheese fish paste. Mamare clan's eating habits trends towards simple street-side snacks.

Just like this, the two of us ate 3 sets of Mentaiko cheese Monjayaki plus New Year cakes, and drank some soda without much gas.

The world's best Monjayaki is Mentaiko cheese Monjayaki plus New Year cakes.

I tried to explain about me publishing my own book, but every time I bring it up, Mamare(younger sister) will invade the Monjayaki borders, so I have no time to do anything but to strengthen my defenses by moving the Monjayaki to my area, a trick that defies ethics.

My frail sister is talented in attacking. She was not listening to me at all, ignoring people more than a Himalayan pika does.

Mamare(younger sister) read Japanese wrong all the time when she was young, like reading Oita prefecture wrongly or pronouncing trampoline as trumpet. This is not Mamare's fault. Even when I correct her, she still refuses to listen.

She shouts 'So good, I am so full!' with a joyous expression, this has not changed since elementary school. So the things inside her head did not change much either. But Mamare who also shouted: "I am so full, Mentaiko is the best!" is not much better.

So until now, Mamare has not mentioned about publishing.

Unrelated to the Mamare family Log Horizon is progressing like a furious tide to be presented to you all. Tohya and Minori the twins will be debuting in this volume, Shiroe's group will be even more lively, they might become the strength to push the group onward.

The equipment listed for the characters at the beginning of each chapter are the result of sourcing from the public.

IGMI_masamune、pdyosulkeKadoh、ebiusl、gontan_、hpsuke、kaze_syuki、m
and other netizens' ideas were used, thank you everyone.

Although the details for the races did not make it in time for publishing, I am still grateful for all the netizens who participated. From stylish equipment to items that make you smile, it is a feast for the eyes. It feels as though all the items contain stories, legends, and knowledge of the world.

Included in the book is a map of Akiba, the editorial department also helped to brainstorm new story-lines, for the latest news please go to <http://mamare.net>, apart from Log Horizon, there is also information on other Mamare novels.

As we move to a close, I am also grateful to chief publisher Mr. Shoji Masuda, and the illustration master Harakazuro-sensei, Tsubakiya firm for the publishing design, the editorial department, and my editor the female petite F-tan chan! Proof reader Mr. Osako! Thank you everyone! Please enjoy this book, take your time!

'The man who loves Monjayaki the most' Mamare.



きっとこのシーンの挿絵オーダーが来るだろうなあと思っていたら

予想がはずれてしまいました。せっかくなので公開です。

HARA

References

1. ↑ TL note: The heart part seems weird, I don't know how to translate it properly. Probably a moe moment.
2. ↑ TL Note: Yappa is a placeholder.
3. ↑ TL note: I used Oniichan to preserve some context
4. ↑ TL note: <some puns I don't understand>.

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Credits

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